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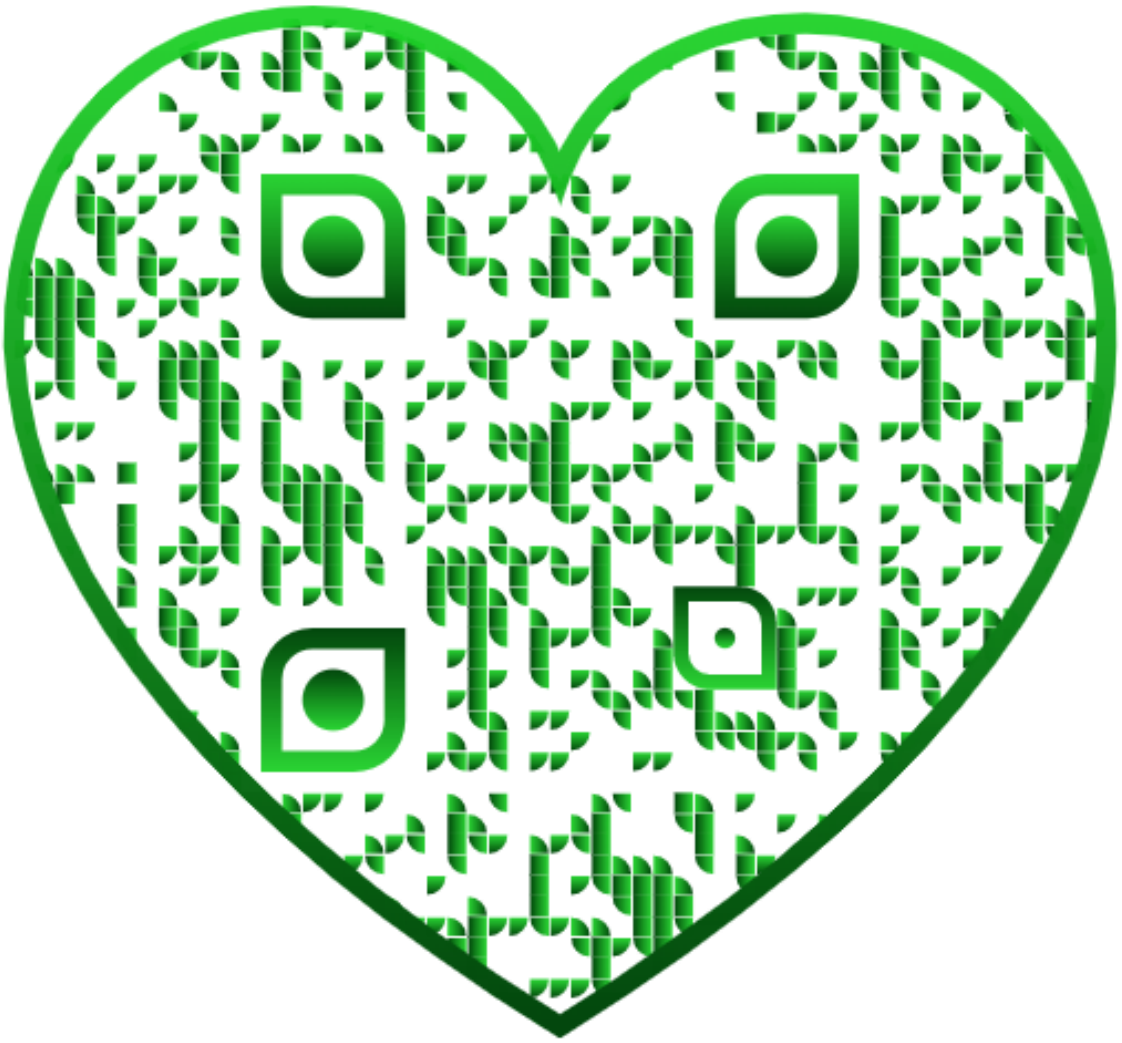

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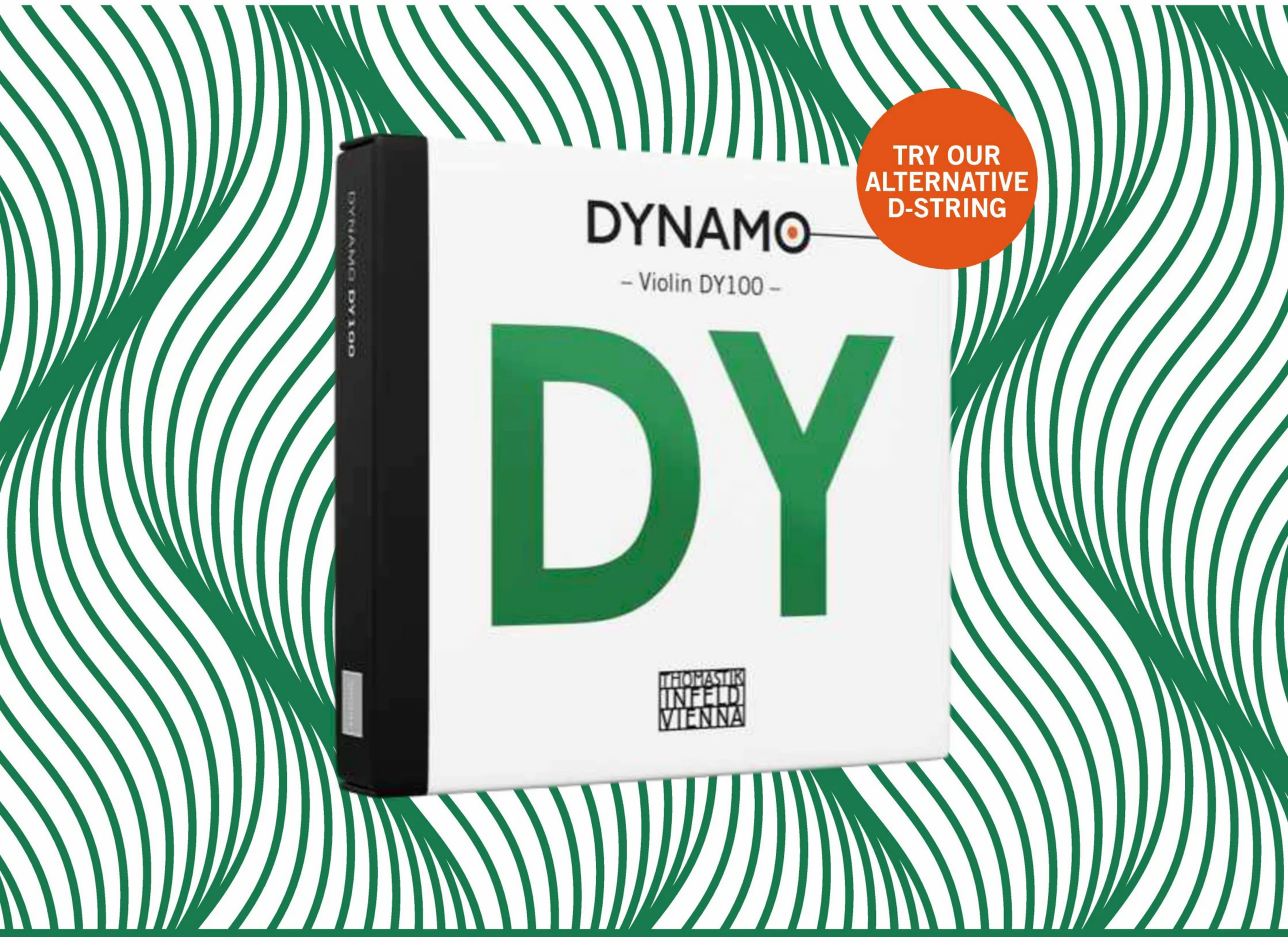


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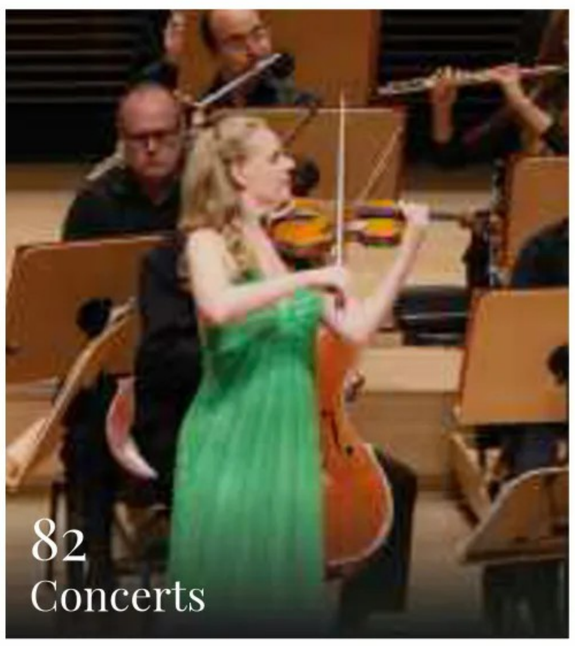

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# Editor's letter

America is a nation blessed with great diversity, but also troubled by great inequality. In the case of classical music, one nonprofit has done more than any other to redress the balance: the Sphinx Organization, working tirelessly to give children and young people of colour a platform to discover and play classical music. Twenty-six years since Sphinx was founded by Aaron Dworkin, its positive influence continues to grow, and its alumni occupy every corner of the US classical musical landscape. Bruce Hodges traces its history on page 32.

Our cover star, double bassist Joseph Conyers, is one of the many musicians to have benefited from Sphinx, as a laureate of its 2004 competition. Now, with his recent appointment as the first black principal bassist of the mighty Philadelphia Orchestra, he continues his groundbreaking work, not only as a player but as a mentor. David Kettle talks to him and discovers something of his irrepressible energy on page 24.

America is a land historically populated by immigrants, and on page 54 Raphael Gold traces a fascinating history of how, and why, so many German bow makers made the journey to the New World in the late 19th century – some staying for just a few years, some permanently – and how their influence shaped the history of the bow making industry in the US.

Last but not least in our US-themed November issue, *The Strad* celebrates a string quartet that has been at the forefront of new and experimental music for an almost unbelievable 50 years – the Kronos Quartet. Thomas May speaks to founding violinist David Harrington and former cellist Joan Jeanrenaud on page 46 about the group's history, and its ambitious programme for its anniversary season.

**Emma Baker** editor

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Cover photo Nicole Roche

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# Contributors

**ROBIN AITCHISON**

(Copying a Montagnana cello, page 38)
specialises in making close copies of individual cellos by Stradivari, Montagnana and Guadagnini. As a counterpoint to cello making, he enjoys sound adjustment and regularly works with a number of distinguished cellists. He lives and works in Ely, UK.

**BRUCE BRAUN BABBITT**

(In Focus, page 61)
has been actively involved in the violin business and historical research since 1974. He is the author of *Markneukirchen Violins and Bows*, *Wanderer/Wonderer* and, as co-author, *The British Bow* and *The German Bow*.

**RAPHAEL GOLD**

(German bow makers in America, page 54)
is a lead associate at Ifshin Violins in California. He is a professional violist, including a seven-year stint with the Yucatán Symphony Orchestra in Mexico. He holds a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago.

**ANNE INGLIS**

(Books, page 93)
was the editor of *The Strad* during the 1980s. Since then she has edited ESTA's quarterly magazine and the journal of the British Violin Making Association. She is an obituarist for the *Guardian* and currently edits *Digital Reporter*, the online magazine for the International School of Musicians (ISoM).

**NICK LLOYD**

(Trade Secrets, page 64)
is a double bass maker and recently completed his 60th instrument. His basses are played in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and at home in the US. He served as bass artisanship judge at the Violin Society of America's 2022 competition.

**CHRISTOPHER SANDVOSS**

(Making Matters, page 70)
is a professional luthier, musician and head instructor at the Canadian Violin Making Institute in Alberta, Canada. In addition to his violin making career, he has performed as a violist in North America and Europe. He spends his evenings teaching violin, viola and chamber music.


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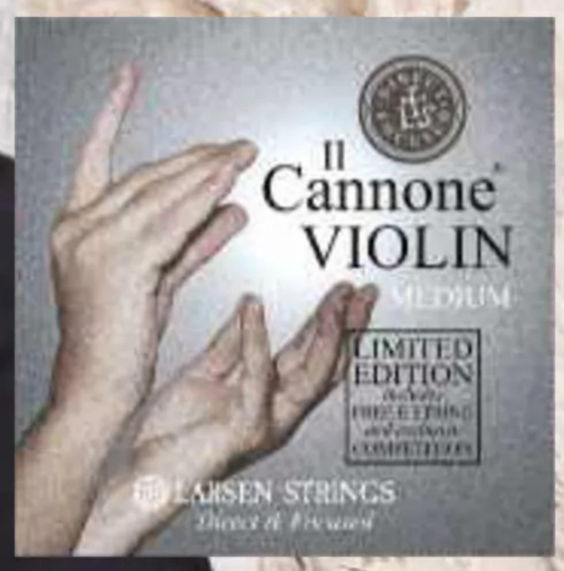


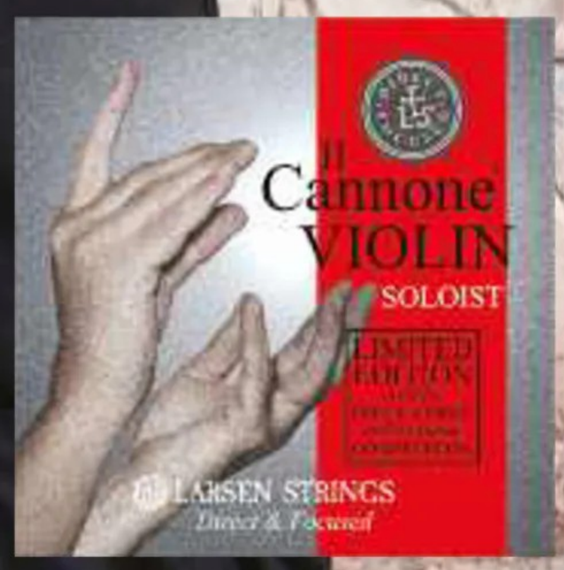


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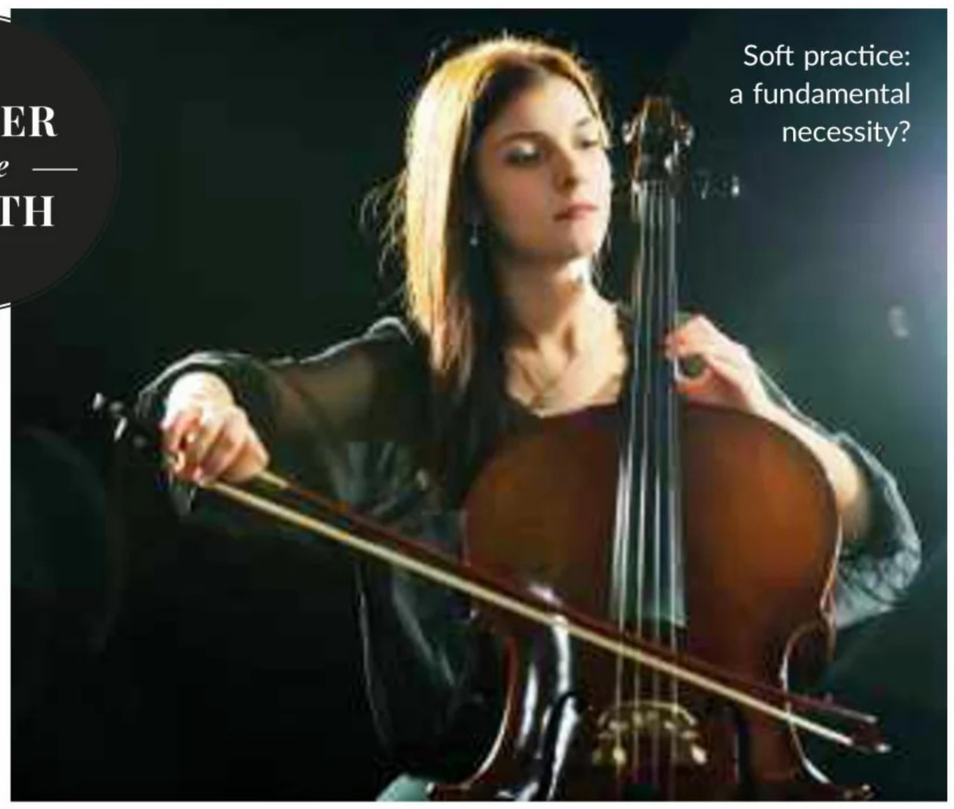

Soft practice: a fundamental necessity?

## STRENGTH THROUGH RELAXATION

Thanks to Davina Shum for her piece on the importance of practising soft playing (Opinion, September 2023). I often hear that players have to give their instrument volume by pressing the bow hard, and the quality of the timbre takes second place. It's a well-known fact, however, that loudness is not the only factor in sound projection. I've seen (and heard) myself on many occasions. Holding the bow by exaggerated muscular pressure and telling the instrument, 'You're going to play even louder now!' by clenching the lips results in a loud sound, but one that screams instead of sings. A sound that screams is not necessarily the one that projects the most.

As a violinist and bow maker, I can confirm that holding your instrument and bow in as relaxed a way as possible is the best method to get not only the best sound from your instrument but also the best projection. On a physical level, holding a bow too firmly slows down the transmission of vibration: so the only way to compensate for the loss of this transmission is to press the bow down hard on the string to create more volume, and that's where the problem lies.

In conversation, you don't need to tighten your abdominal muscles to make yourself heard, which means you speak in a relaxed way. If you do need to make yourself heard, it's good to think of opera singers. When they have to sing fortissimo, they don't scream; they position their voices and make their bodies resonate. If they screamed, they certainly wouldn't be opera singers!

This doesn't mean you have to play without muscular power, but you can combine strength with relaxation. Asian martial arts show us this in the most obvious way. Some soloists play with very flexible bows that require a relaxed bowing technique, and they can fill any symphony hall with their powerful sound. So when you're used to playing this way, playing pianissimo is no problem, but it requires above all to learn the technique that goes along with it.

**BENOÎT ROLLAND**
*Boston, MA, US*


LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

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## THE Z THAT STANDS FOR ZOSIMO

Michel Samson's article on the instruments of Carlo Bergonzi's son 'Zosimo' was fascinating ('Family fortunes', September 2023). However, in the photos of the Bergonzi moulds on page 68, the spelling is clearly 'Cosimo' Bergonzi. We trust that it is the handwriting of the maker himself. In the census record on page 67, the name 'Zosimo' does indeed appear above Michele Angelo's, but the 'Z' could be a mistake. 'Cosimo' is a proper Italian first name and I have heard of plenty of Cosimos – but Zosimo? Never before.

**CSABA ERDÉLYI**
*Bowling Green, OH, US*

*Michel Samson replies:* The explanation is simple: 'Cosimo' is Italian while 'Zosimo' is a Latinised version of the Greek 'Zosimus'. The 'Cosimo' spelling does appear on the moulds (*below*) but, indeed, no one can say whether Bergonzi wrote it himself. Moreover, none of the instruments identified as his contain labels. Maybe he was illiterate – but there is no question that he was an expert violin maker.

CELLIST PHOTO GETTY. MOULD PHOTO COURTESY DMITRY GINDIN

## AT THE SALES

While reading the article on finding the right bow ('A marriage made in Heaven', October 2023) it struck me that the musicians and tutors interviewed for the piece were missing an easy win. Fundamentally, the best way

to choose a bow is to try lots of bows, and a quick and easy way of doing that is to attend an instrument auction. They'll find innumerable bows laid out for them to sample, and they'll be quite welcome to take along their own instrument and test out as many as they like. It's also the best way to discover the enormous variety in style, weight and balance – and if you don't happen to find your perfect bow at the first one, you'll certainly get some pointers as to the makers and periods you like best.

**MOLLY MATTHEW**
*Norwich, UK*

## DISSENT AMONG THE RANKS

I enjoyed Alexandra Gorski's Opinion piece on how an orchestra's greatest strength needs to be its adaptability to different challenges and repertoire ('Strength in flexibility', October 2023). In particular, her comment rang true that 'not every orchestra is so malleable, especially when there is disagreement about interpretation… members of a group refuting a conductor's musical choices'. It's commendable that Gorski sees it as the orchestra's job to follow the conductor; the trouble is, though, that not all conductors are at the same level of greatness! I was reminded of *The Strad*'s 2012 interview with Chaim Taub, concertmaster of the Israel Philharmonic, in which he stated there were 'concerts that felt like they weren't going anywhere – nothing moved at all. So I'd give a certain look to the principal cellist, violist and second violinist to say, "Follow me" – and suddenly the orchestra would become quite good. Then the conductor would be very happy as he thought he'd done it.' There has to be a fine balance between going with the conductor's interpretation and simply making good music.

Chaim Taub with the IPO under Zubin Mehta

**BRUCE RICHARDSON**
*Dumfries, UK*

BEILMAN PHOTO SOPHIE ZHAI. TAUB PHOTO G. ROZANSKI/MURRAY S. KATZ PHOTO ARCHIVE OF THE IPO

ONLINE COMMENT

**Davina Shum's Opinion piece on playing softly resonated with readers:** bit.ly/3LsumJ4

**PETRA MALÍŠKOVÁ** Ideal reading for the beginning of the season

**JENNIFER MARTIN** Yes yes yes! A thousand times yes! Every instrument! Every voice! Every genre!

**GEORGIOS GIAMBANAS** This applies to piano as well. Although it is called a 'pianoforte', playing very low (piano, pianissimo) is difficult and needs special study, especially fast pieces.

## www.thestrad.com
## TOP 3
## ONLINE POSTS

**1** How does it feel to play Ysaÿe's violin? 'Silky smooth' – Benjamin Beilman (*above*) bit.ly/44XbKYK

**2** Violist Miles Hoffman has died (see page 14) bit.ly/45XUILI

**3** Opinion: The importance (and difficulty) of playing softly bit.ly/3LsumJ4

## PODCAST OF THE MONTH

the Strad PODCAST

**Episode #92**: remembering Geoff Nuttall of the St Lawrence String Quartet
bit.ly/3PIyW8q

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# *On* the beat

News and events from around the world this month

Read all the breaking news in the string world online www.thestrad.com

## As fit as a fiddle?

**A new report highlights the importance of health awareness for players, teachers and performing arts institutions – and reaches some startling conclusions**

***By Peter Somerford***

Researchers Zahavah Zinn-Kirchner and Philipp Caffier examine a professional violinist with a musculoskeletal disorder

COURTESY PHILIPP CAFFIER

Researchers at the Berlin Centre for Musicians' Medicine have published a review of the prevalence of playing-related medical problems in violinists. The review by the institution, part of the city's Charité university hospital, pulled together 30 scientific papers exploring different playing-related conditions in a total of 6,010 musicians, including at least 920 violinists (bit.ly/3PpMULi). The studies cited in the review address conditions such as muscular disease, focal dystonia, hearing loss, fiddler's neck (or violinist's hickey) and allergic reactions. The review's authors also consider how specific ailments and injuries are treated, and discuss the importance of preventive strategies and the need for more education of string students in basic anatomy and biomechanics.

One of the review authors, Zahavah Zinn-Kirchner, has personal experience of carpal tunnel syndrome and fiddler's neck, having played the violin since the age of four. She was surprised and shocked, however, by some of the findings related to jaw pain and cranial bone development, and also by the incidence rates of hearing loss. 'One study found that in young children the development of their facial bones was altered if they spent a certain number of hours playing violin,' she says. 'I also found it interesting and a little horrifying that so many violinists experienced hearing loss.'

In its discussion of preventive strategies, the review suggests that 'implementing warm-ups and other ergonomic habits, as well as educating all musicians on the importance of looking after their health, may be able to effect the necessary paradigm shift'. Drawing parallels between professional musicians and high-level performance athletes, Zinn-Kirchner says: 'As a society, we are used to talking about the health regimes of athletes – their nutrition, warm-ups, stretching afterwards and rehabilitation – because people associate sport with physicality. But playing an instrument can also be very physical. Recognising the job of a violinist as being an intense profession that could potentially predispose you to ailments and injuries is vital.'

Among other steps towards better health awareness, Zinn-Kirchner suggests that violinists need to recognise the dangers of overloading their bodies with too much intensive practice. 'There are certain symbols of pride among players, like the notion of a big violinist's hickey being a sign of how much practice time someone has put in and how diligent they've been. The idea that the amount of hours you practise, or the stress you're putting your body under, is correlated with performance or superiority would be a good concept to start challenging.' Teachers have a role and responsibility to instruct their students in good ergonomic habits,

'Emphasising long-term health over a perfect rehearsal is so important' – *Zahavah Zinn-Kirchner, researcher, Berlin Centre for Musicians' Medicine*

she adds, and conductors have a responsibility to set the tone in rehearsals and help ensure that orchestras are safe and sustainable working environments. 'Emphasising long-term health over temporary perfect tone or a perfect rehearsal is so important,' she says.

In the UK, the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM) has developed an online learning programme addressing various aspects of performance training and wellbeing such as posture, overuse, rest and recovery, fitness and nutrition. The programme of free weekly webinars, which was introduced last September, has been running again this autumn. One of the programme trainers, Cambridge-based physiotherapist and educator Dr Sarah Upjohn, says that up to 80 per cent of musicians are affected over their playing lifetime by musculoskeletal disorders but that 'in most of the musicians I see, the injuries are preventable'. As the physiotherapist for the Purcell School for Young Musicians and as wellbeing lead for the National Children's Orchestras of Great Britain (NCO), she works with and advises many young string players. 'In the UK, BAPAM is great for supporting conservatoire students and professional performing artists, and the Healthy Conservatoires network disseminates information about current best practice,' says Upjohn. 'But we need to ensure that we start talking to young musicians about health and wellbeing a long time before they are 18. We have a safeguarding responsibility – to prevent injuries that are preventable. More work is needed, but forward-thinking institutions such as the Purcell School and NCO are doing a great job at pushing the wellbeing agenda.'

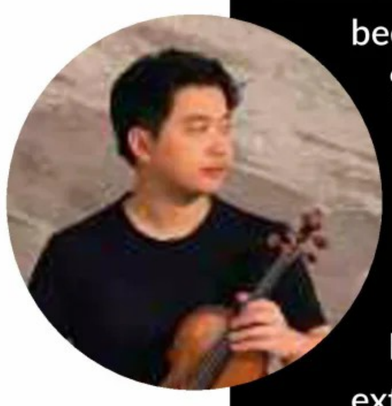
Upjohn proposes that health information could be disseminated more widely at a younger age simply by making it part of graded performance exams. 'If these exams included a question about wellbeing, then the issues would be taught from day one,' she says. She also suggests that wellbeing could be normalised in music classrooms, teaching studios and practice rooms by having, for example, posters of upper limb anatomy on display alongside the standard posters showing the circle of 5ths or the sections of the orchestra.

'Instrumental teachers play a key role,' says Upjohn. 'They need to have the right information about healthy playing to give their students, and they need to know the risk factors. For example, immediately after a growth spurt might not be the ideal time to introduce a more technically demanding piece, or have the student switch to a bigger instrument – just when the student is getting used to changes in their body.'

YUN-SHIOU TSAI

## NEWS IN BRIEF

**Violinist William Wei to perform on 'Joachim, Elman' Stradivari bit.ly/3EFWRz8**



Taiwanese violinist William Wei (*right*) has been granted the use of the 1722 'Joachim, Elman' Stradivari violin by the Chimei Culture Foundation. The instrument has been part of the foundation's collection since 1991, but this is the first time it has been given to a musician on extended loan. 'I've been thinking about this violin since I was twelve years old,' he said. 'Now that I can borrow it, the biggest dream in my life has come true.'

**New York Philharmonic receives $40 million gift bit.ly/3RnSNuY**

The New York Philharmonic has announced that Oscar L. Tang and Agnes Hsu-Tang have made a gift of $40 million that will further expand the orchestra's future programming and engagement with New York's diverse communities and the international music world. The gift is the largest-ever single contribution to the NY Phil's endowment. The chair will be endowed commencing in 2025.

**Juilliard announces new head of chamber music bit.ly/3EGZsc3**

New York's Juilliard School has announced the appointment of Merry Peckham as its new assistant dean and director of chamber music from January 2024. Peckham is a chamber musician, educator and arts administrator who currently serves as chair of chamber music at the New England Conservatory (NEC) and associate director for the Perlman Music Program. Prior to that, Peckham was coordinator of string chamber music at Oberlin Conservatory and, in 1988, became a faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Do you have a topical story concerning the string music world? Email us at **thestrad@thestrad.com**

## OBITUARIES

### RICHARD DAVIS

US double bassist Richard Davis died on 6 September at the age of 93. As well as being an inspirational jazz musician, he was a leading pedagogue and social justice activist.

Born in 1930 in Chicago, Davis attended VanderCook College of Music while studying with Rudolf Fahsbender of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. After college he performed in dance bands, until, in 1954, he moved to New York with pianist Don Shirley. He then performed with the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra and became part of Sarah Vaughan's rhythm section from 1957 to 1960.

Davis spent more than 20 years on the New York jazz and studio scene. He recorded a dozen albums as a leader and 3,000 recordings and jingles as a sideman. As a classical musician, Davis played under conductors such as George Szell, Leopold Stokowski, Igor Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, Gunther Schuller and Leonard Bernstein. He moved to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1977 where he taught for 39 years.

In 1993 Davis founded the Richard Davis Foundation for Young Bassists, Inc., which holds annual masterclasses for bassists aged 3 to 18. In 1998 he created the Retention Action Project, which focuses on open dialogues on subjects related to multicultural differences.

### MIRJAM INGOLFSSON

Philadelphia-based cellist Mirjam Ingolfsson died on 21 August aged 49. The Icelandic-born cellist had been living with cancer for 25 years.

Born in Reykjavik in 1974 to a family of musicians and artists, Ingolfsson began playing the cello at the age of four. Aged seven she toured Europe and the US, and recorded Bach's Cello Suite no.1 in G major for Belgian State Radio in Brussels. A year later she made her solo debut at the 1983 Spoleto USA Festival.

Ingolfsson received her bachelor's degree from the Curtis Institute of Music and pursued graduate studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music and Temple University, where she received her master of music degree. Her teachers included Orlando Cole, Alan Harris, Jeffrey Solow and Nathaniel Rosen.

She was a prizewinner at the Graham Stahl Cello Competition and participated at the Piatigorsky Seminar in Los Angeles and festivals such as the Bach Festival of Philadelphia, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival in Germany and the Jeunesse Musicales Festival in Switzerland.

Ingolfsson established herself as a performer and pedagogue in the Philadelphia region, co-founding the Leopold Mozart Academy in 2001, where she taught cello, music theory and solfège. She was a founding member of Archi Celesti and performed as a cellist with the Prometheus Chamber Orchestra. She also performed as a soloist with the Icelandic Symphony, Tuscaloosa Symphony, the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, the Abington Symphony Orchestra and the Ocean City Pops.

### GARETH WOOD

Welsh double bassist and composer Gareth Wood has died aged 73. He was a member and chairman of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) and a prolific composer for brass bands.

Born in Cilfynydd, Wales in 1950, Wood studied composition and double bass at the Royal Academy of Music, joining the RPO in 1972. He became chairman of the orchestra in 1991, a post he held for three years.

As a composer, he first came to the attention of the public in 1975 when his overture *Tombstone, Arizona* was performed at the Royal Albert Hall during the National Brass Band Festival. His portfolio included numerous works for brass bands, including the 1992 European Championship set work, *Five Blooms in a Welsh Garden*. Wood also composed concertos, a sonata and chamber music for the double bass.

As an educator, Wood taught at the National Centre for Young Bass Players, and composed *Light*, a dectet for the Centre's basses, in 2011.

### MILES HOFFMAN

US violist Miles Hoffman died on 18 August aged 71. He was founder and violist of the American Chamber Players, and was visiting professor of chamber music at the Schwob School of Music, in Columbus, GA.

Born in 1952, Hoffman was a graduate of Yale University and the Juilliard School. As a broadcaster, he served as a classical music commentator for NPR's *Morning Edition* from 2002, and in 1997 published *NPR Classical Music Companion: An Essential Guide for Enlightened Listening*. His 'Minutes with Miles' modules were produced by South Carolina Public Radio, many of which were recently compiled into the book *Inside the World of Classical Music: 205 Illuminating Mini-Essays*.

Hoffman served as dean of the Petrie School of Music from 2007 to 2010 and associate professor of viola and chamber music from 2010 to 2014.

### GILES BROADBENT

British violinist Giles Broadbent has died at the age of 51 following a short illness. He was a founder member of the electric string quartet Stringfever.

Born in 1972, Broadbent studied at the Royal Academy of Music and went on to lead orchestras of several shows in London's West End, including *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and *My Fair Lady*. In 2003 he formed Stringfever with his brothers Ralph and Neal and cousin Graham. They played live shows all over the globe, completing almost 20 US tours and appearing in multiple other performances on television and radio. Stringfever's version of Ravel's *Boléro*, where all four players perform on one cello simultaneously, has had more than a million hits on YouTube.

In 2015 both Giles and Ralph Broadbent were awarded the title of Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, presented to alumni who have significantly contributed to the music profession.

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STAY IN THE KNOW

THE LEGEND OF STRAD: Visitors examine books, posters and artefacts relating to *il Mistero de Stradivari* ('the Mystery of Stradivari'), the title of an exhibition at Cremona's State Library showing how the legend of the master luthier developed in the later 19th century. Co-curated by Luca Bastiani and Raffaella Barbierato, the collection brings together around 50 pieces including newspaper articles, catalogues and memorabilia relating to Stradivari, published between 1872 and 1937. Running until 30 September, the exhibition also included original correspondence by Count Cozio di Salabue. Photo: Pablo Farias

PREMIERE *of the* MONTH

# Speaking the language

## A new violin concerto follows the contours of speech

COMPOSER **Lotta Wennäkoski**
WORK ***Prosoidia***
ARTIST **Ilya Gringolts (violin) BBC Symphony Orchestra/Eva Ollikainen**
DATE **3 November 2023**
PLACE **Barbican, London, UK** bitly.ws/UPj5

Lotta Wennäkoski

Ilya Gringolts

Finnish composer Lotta Wennäkoski's new violin concerto, *Prosoidia*, is the product of two converging themes. 'I started to plan the piece in the spring of 2022, when my neighbouring country attacked its neighbour,' she says about the onset of the Russia–Ukraine war. 'I felt so much helplessness that it was obvious I somehow had to write an emotional piece.' The second influence was the phenomenon of prosody: the stresses, rhythm and 'music in language', she says. The work will be performed by Ilya Gringolts, who Wennäkoski describes as having an 'inner peace when he plays'.

The concerto's first movement is based on a line from a poem by Russian poet Marina Tsvetaev: 'So what have you to say, O poet, general, lover?' 'She wrote it during World War One. It's a very pacifistic poem,' says Wennäkoski, who finds the text as poignant as ever. The movement includes speech-like instructions such as *parlando* and has the orchestra members whispering. The melody's contours are influenced by the rhythm and inflection of the words.

The brisk second movement, 'Word Stress', is based on the composer's experience of moving to Hungary to study violin. It is marked by the 'prosody of the Finnish and Hungarian languages', which both stress the first syllables of words. The music is based on the composer's existing arrangement of a Hungarian folk song.

The melancholic last movement, 'Prosody', is in memory of Wennäkoski's teacher, the late Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho. It is inspired by a scene in one of Swedish director Ingmar Bergman's movies in which two sisters are reunited, with the Sarabande from Bach's Cello Suite no.5 playing instead of speech. The movement includes material from the Sarabande. The composer says that the concerto is one of her most personal pieces to date. 'It will be very exciting to hear if that emotion comes through in the premiere,' she says.

WENNÄKOSKI PHOTO MAARIT KYTÖHARJU. GRINGOLTS PHOTO KAUPO KIKKAS

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Jeffrey Zeigler

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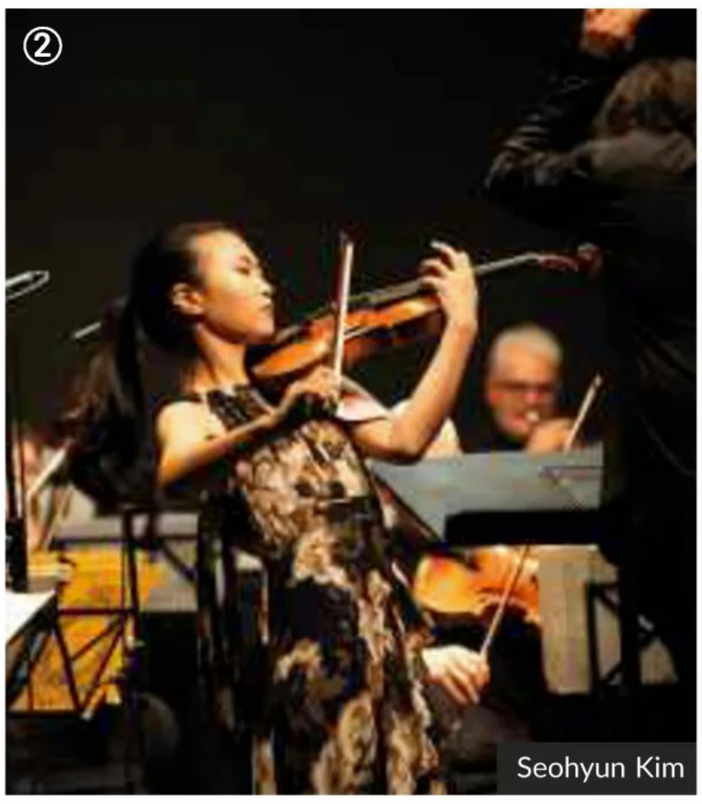
## COMPETITIONS


Seohyun Kim

ARD Competition viola laureates

Philipp Schupelius

❶ Moldovan violinist **Lilia Pocitari,** 25, has won the top prize of €22,000 at the **Bartók World Competition** in Budapest, Hungary. She also won the €2,000 prize for best performance of the compulsory contemporary piece. Second prize and €14,000 went to Japanese violinist Tomotaka Seki, 25, while third prize and €8,000 went to German–Polish–Japanese violinist Maya Alexandra Kasprzak, 17.

❷ South Korean violinist **Seohyun Kim**, 14, has won the CHF20,000 (£18,000) first prize at the **Tibor Varga Violin Competition**, which took place in Sion, Switzerland. She also won the Youth Jury Prize. Swiss violinist Raphael Nussbaumer, 17, took home the CHF10,000 second prize and the audience prize, while Japanese violinist Rennosuke Fukuda, 23, received the third prize, worth CHF5,000.

❸ The **ARD International Music Competition**'s viola, double bass and piano trio categories' winners were announced in September. **Trio Orelon** won the €18,000 first prize in the piano trio category, while second prize went the Amelio Trio and third to Trio Pantoum. In the viola category, **Haesue Lee**, 23, took the €10,000 first prize and audience award, while Takehiro Konoe, 25, and Ionel Ungureanu, 28, took joint third prize. **Gabriel Polinsky**, 24, won the €10,000 first prize in the double bass category, while Hongyiu Thomas Lai, 28, came second and José Trigo, 27, came third.

❹ German cellist **Philipp Schupelius**, 20, was one of the two winners at the **German Music Awards**, given by the German Music Council. The prize includes performance opportunities, a debut CD and industry coaching. He currently studies at the Kronberg Academy with Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt.

## FORTHCOMING COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

**International String Quartet Competition 'Premio Paolo Borciani'** in Reggio Emilia, Italy, for string quartets aged 35 or under. First prize €25,000 **Deadline** 8 December; competition 8–16 June 2024 **Web** premioborciani.it

**Primrose International Viola Competition** in Los Angeles, CA, US, for violists aged 31 or under. First prize $15,000 **Deadline** 15 January; competition 17–22 June 2024 **Web** primrosecompetition.org

**International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition** in Leipzig, Germany, for cellists aged 16–33. First prize €10,000 **Deadline** 29 February; competition 16–27 July 2024 **Web** bachwettbewerbleipzig.de

KIM PHOTO CÉLINE RIBORDY KAMERZIN. ARD PHOTO DANIEL DELANG. SCHUPELIUS PHOTO HEIKE FISCHER

## APPOINTMENTS

- Korean–American violist **Brian Hong** and US cellist **Caleb van der Swaagh** will join the Aizuri Quartet in its upcoming season
- Trio Michelangeli has named Chinese–American violinist **Luke Tsu** as its new member
- US violist **Joseph Skerik** has been announced as the Vega Quartet's new violist
- Cellist and educator **Richard Aaron** will begin his new role as professor of cello at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in autumn 2023

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EBONY ALTERNATIVE

# Feel the heat

**Thermally modified wood makes its entrance into violin making**

ThermalWood Canada, a New Brunswick-based supplier of thermally modified wood, recently ventured into the world of ebony alternatives for guitar fingerboards. Now it has turned its attention to the violin making world. The company's flagship product is a range of thermally modified hardwoods usually used for, among other things, decking and flooring. The wood is heated at high temperatures to stabilise its molecular structure. This makes it less susceptible to external conditions such as changing moisture levels, which is especially useful in the realm of stringed instruments.

The company's CEO Bob Lennon first heard of the music industry's issues with sourcing ebony when supplying wood for guitar necks: 'The big problem with ebony is the extensive paperwork, and the control over and consistency of supply.' ThermalWood's ebony alternative, Obsidian Ebony, is made from modified maple, and came to fruition after a long experimentation period interrupted by the pandemic. The final process involves pressurising a mixture of resins, hardeners and dyes into the already modified wood. Bespoke machinery was developed by an innovation group from the local community college. The resulting product is even blacker than ebony, and has the same density and weight.

*FEATURED* PRODUCT

Lennon explains the move into the bowed instrument market was firstly a way to reduce waste, owing to the fingerboards being on average smaller than those on guitars. And secondly, it is 'not just about dealing with the particulars of the market', he says, 'but dealing with different cultures. That's interesting to me.'

The main advantages of the product, Lennon continues, is that it is a 'real wood alternative', instead of being a composite material or one that goes through chemical processes. Additionally, luthiers can continue to use their usual tools. And most importantly, the maple is ethically sourced in northern New Brunswick. 'If we can do our part, from a rural town in eastern Canada, to prevent even one species of ebony from becoming extinct, that's a big feat,' Lennon says.

**ThermalWood Canada Obsidian Ebony** contact for personalised pricing
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# *Life lessons*

## Matthew McDonald

The Australian double bassist on his influences and journey to becoming the Berlin Philharmonic's section principal

**One of my most influential teachers**, Max McBride, was the first professional bassist I ever heard when growing up in Australia. I thought the dancing physicality of his playing was just what one did on the double bass, and I totally copied his moves. As well as his wonderful teaching, I remember playing in Strauss's *Elektra* alongside him when I was a student. He had a one-note solo that expressed such a depth of emotion that I still think about it when I have solos of my own. Another important teacher was Esko Laine, who taught me in Berlin and with whom I still share a stand today. In lessons with him, I kept asking questions. I remember him eventually saying, 'Don't think technically. Just keep trying.' I realised it was up to me to observe which movement corresponded to which sound.

**In some ways I only started taking in my lessons** years after I'd had them. For example, Kees Boersma, another of my teachers in Australia, often told me to play closer to the bridge, use less pressure in the left hand, and find natural weight in the bow arm. There are so many aspects of string technique that require a period of relinquishing control to master them.

**In 2000 I moved to Berlin from Australia** to join the Karajan Academy. My first winter in the northern hemisphere was a real shock, and I could only just order a beer in German. I was playing with the Berlin Philharmonic at least every two weeks, and although they were kind to me I felt isolated. But once I finished the Academy in the summer of 2001, I had this nagging feeling that I belonged at the Berlin Philharmonic. I think a lot of my development as a player was motivated by this dream. For the last of my three auditions for the orchestra, I practised for six months, regularly performing run-throughs for anyone who'd listen. I would advise young players not to do auditions 'just for experience', as you'll have a terrible time if you're not fully prepared.

*Being a good leader means being a good chamber musician*

**As section principal at the Berlin Philharmonic,** I quickly learnt that the bass section plays first. I remember the final pizzicato of a Brahms slow movement and the concertmaster waiting for me to lead it. I'd always followed them before. Among other things, being a good leader means being a good chamber musician. It also takes time to develop the trust to know when not to lead. I'm often amazed how well we play a pizzicato in a vague section just by everyone feeling 'now' at the same time. This is what makes music so magical, but it can only be achieved by letting go of control.

**I think it's very important** for musicians to pursue interests outside of music: some climb mountains, some fly planes, others design apps. I did a master's in creative writing and set up a poetry magazine. Having these non-musical interests helps to keep your relationship with music healthy in so many ways.

INTERVIEW BY RITA FERNANDES

McDonald in 1999 on tour in South Africa with the Sydney Conservatorium Chamber Orchestra

TOP PHOTO SEBASTIAN HAENEL. BOTTOM PHOTO COURTESY MATTHEW MCDONALD

# A REST'S AS GOOD AS A CHANGE

**Cellist and teacher Naomi Yandell is often pleasantly surprised at how much progress can be made by students during a break from lessons**

Sometimes it can be surprising to a teacher just how quickly the terms seem to pass once they're in the thick of their teaching routine. Weeks seem to whizz past in a blur and suddenly the holidays lie on the horizon. What a relief, they might think – so ready are they for a break. It has all been that bit intense. This gets me thinking about how teachers can be tempted to consider the holidays from a personal point of view, as a time to get a generally needed good rest and reset. But what of the students?

At the beginning of this term, I received a letter from a student's mother. She wrote: 'She had a great time at junior orchestra! Thank you for the recommendation. She can't wait to go back again.' She is already booked in for the Christmas course, I gather. There is no orchestra at school so this was clearly a real highlight for her.

When she returned from the first course, she was a different player. OK, her technique had suffered a bit, but she was bursting with enthusiasm and her sightreading and general fluency had improved greatly. After a week or two we were back on track, and she had it in mind that she might be able to advance to a higher group when she next attends the orchestra course, so she was motivated to practise harder and more often.

I was recently chatting about holiday courses to another cello teacher. He was opining that we all fail sometimes as teachers, and that if we can't always get the message across to our students then someone else relaying it in a different way can be extremely helpful. He had been struggling for ages to correct a student's left-hand elbow. Nothing he said seemed to make any difference until one day, after the holidays, she came in and played with it in the perfect position. How? Why? Apparently, she explained, her chamber coach had told her how to do it. He was intrigued. What had the coach said? The student was vague, but that seemed somewhat irrelevant, since it had worked.

A period of absolute rest for a student is also valid, of course, and may be beneficial in some cases. Students return with a clear head, and, particularly over longer holidays, they can benefit from a period of processing material from the previous term. On returning, they are often rusty, but after a week or two they have rediscovered their previous form, and more. This effect is amplified with younger students, who have not only assimilated what they have learnt the previous term, but have usually grown considerably, and can manage to do things that haven't been possible before for developmental or physical reasons. It is quite astounding how much younger students can grow in a short time and how helpful this can be. It might even mean a move to a larger instrument with all the excitement of the attendant improvement in sound (and a new varnish colour!).

*A period of absolute rest for a student is also valid and may be beneficial in some cases*

What a student does in the holidays is up to them, of course, and to their parents. However, as a teacher, I do like to suggest possible activities, whether it be the occasional optional lesson, a chamber or orchestral course, or an opportunity for students to try something else entirely, such as djembe drumming or singing in a choir.

I find chamber music to be the greatest motivator. Talking of which, I had another email at the beginning of term: 'He loved playing in the quartet. He has been practising a lot during the holidays and I am loving playing duets with him.' This was music to my ears.

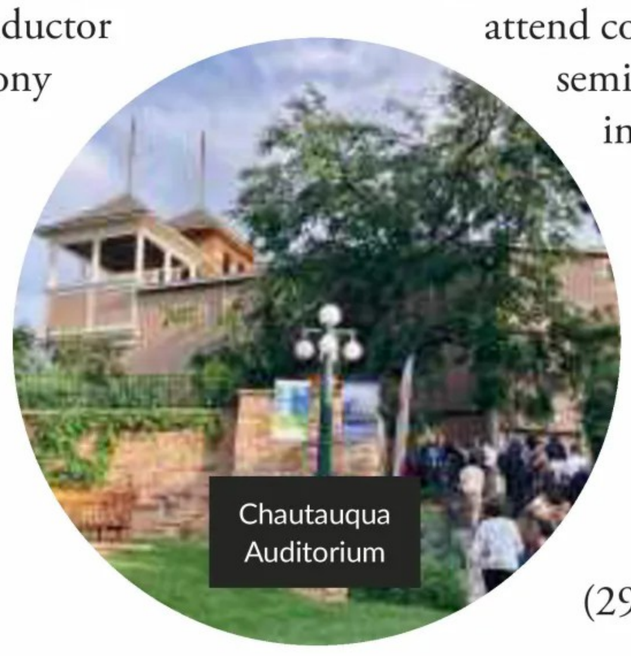
Whatever path a student has chosen to take during holiday time, it is more than likely to have enhanced their musical experience and/or dexterity in a way that their teacher can build on in the term ahead.

# It's elemental

A chance to hear the world premiere of a brand new violin concerto commissioned and played by Joshua Bell was the highlight of a trip to the Colorado Music Festival for **Emma Baker**

The drive west across the Colorado plains towards Boulder took my breath away: against a wide, dramatic sky the Rocky Mountains rise up and stretch from horizon to horizon, dividing continental North America from Canada to New Mexico.

For six weeks each summer since 1976, this spectacular setting has been home to the Colorado Music Festival (CMF). Under the music directorship of Peter Oundjian, principal conductor of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra and former leader of the Tokyo Quartet, the festival is known for star visiting soloists and new commissions, and for its orchestra, which is made up of section principals from top US orchestras, who converge on the delightful university town of Boulder for the duration of the festival. The CMF has an eye on future talent too, through its Festival Fellows programme. Eight aspiring professional string players from diverse backgrounds are selected from leading US conservatoires to be embedded in the festival for its duration. The 2023 Fellows – four individual players and a string quartet – had the opportunity to attend coaching sessions and seminars, as well as perform in festival concerts. It is an unparalleled opportunity to be heard by and make valuable connections with members of the best orchestras in the US, all in one place.


Chautauqua Auditorium

For the 2023 edition (29 June–6 August) some of the visiting big names included the Jack Quartet, cellist Johannes Moser and violinist Grace Park, as well composer-in-residence John Corigliano.

When I arrived, for the final two concerts of the festival, the spotlight was on Joshua Bell, who was in town to workshop and perform the world premiere of his new commission: a suite for violin and orchestra, *The Elements*.

I attended the final rehearsal at the festival's historic concert venue, the Chautauqua Auditorium. Built in 1898 as part of a US-wide social and cultural movement, it's a vast, barn-like structure that seats an audience of 1,300, and is constructed almost entirely from wood. There is no artificial heating or cooling, save for a couple of enormous ceiling fans, and I could see daylight in between the pine slats that make up the walls, but the acoustic of this 125-year-old structure is marvellously warm and clear.

It was the ideal place to hear a new work take shape. For *The Elements*, Bell commissioned five leading American contemporary composers – Jake Heggie, Jennifer Higdon, Edgar Meyer, Jessie Montgomery and Kevin Puts – each to write a movement based on the classical elements (fire, water, earth and air) with the addition of a fifth 'element': space. The full work was split over two concerts as a preview performance, before its official world premiere in Hamburg in the autumn. That morning all three of the composers featured in the first concert were present – Puts (*Earth*), Meyer (*Water*) and Heggie (*Fire*). It was intriguing to watch the interactions between soloist, composer, conductor and orchestra and witness the fine-tuning at the end of a long collaborative process.

What of the music? I was struck by the work's sense of unity, despite its featuring different composers, and also its immediately approachable tonal and lyrical style. This is just what Bell was aiming for, as he told me after the rehearsal. 'I'm not the guy for extreme avant-garde music. I never have been. There are those who embrace and do

COURTESY OF COLORADO MUSIC FESTIVAL

Joshua Bell performs *The Elements* with Peter Oundjian conducting the Colorado Music Festival orchestra

amazing jobs with twelve-tone music and do it really convincingly, but I am not one of those. There is so much to do in this life and you can't do everything!'

After the rehearsals I explored the area around the Chautauqua Auditorium, which is situated in the leafy Boulder suburb of the same name. The building looks south-east from its high vantage point over the Colorado plains and towards Denver. I wandered up a nearby hiking trail that leads up to the Flatirons, a mountain range that stands in jagged contrast against the intensely blue sky.

I also had the chance to visit downtown Boulder, which has a delightful main pedestrian thoroughfare, Pearl Street, lined with shops, cafés and street performers. Close by is the Boulder Dushanbe Teahouse, which thanks to a cultural exchange with Tajikistan was built in that country, shipped over to the US and reassembled in its current location. It's not to be missed, both for the colourful mosaic-like carvings on the walls and ceiling, and the tea, which comes in more flavours than it's possible to imagine.

It was back to a sold-out Chautauqua Auditorium for the concert that evening. Oundjian introduced the music and the composers, expressing his and Bell's ambition that *The Elements* would be 'a *Four Seasons* for the 21st century'. First we heard *Earth* by Puts: it was an absorbing, lyrical movement based on a four-note ostinato with a solo line that showcased Bell's silky, silvery tone on his 1713 'Huberman' Strad. Meyer's *Water* featured nimble, sinuous solo passagework; his movement had a touch of Debussy about it, which was appropriate enough as we were treated to the French composer's *La Mer* in the second half of the concert. Jake Heggie, best known as a composer of operas – contributed *Fire*, which had a whirling *Csárdás*-like dance at its core.

Three days later the second concert featured a full reprise of the opening movement, Puts' *Earth*, followed by Higdon's *Air*. I was very taken with this movement, which has a glorious, wide-ranging theme that swoops and soars between the solo violin part and orchestra. In her pre-concert talk, when asked by Oundjian why she chose this element, Higdon quipped: 'It was the only one left.' The penultimate movement was Montgomery's *Space*. A violinist herself, the composer has written a striking solo cadenza for Bell, and orchestral textures that glittered with touches of harp and percussion. Then followed a short reprise of Puts's *Earth* but changed 'as if returning to earth but with a new perspective', Bell told me. Puts had added this movement with just a couple of weeks' notice, after Bell and Oundjian had discussions about the ending of the piece. 'Peter is the ideal person to workshop this piece with, because he and I are friends and we bounce ideas off each other,' Bell explained. 'As I am doing more and more conducting myself I go to him to pick his brains about things. We have the kind of working relationship where we text each other late at night saying: "What do you think we should do in bar 62?" It's wonderful to be able to have that exchange. I certainly wouldn't have been texting Kurt Masur, as great as he was!'

Oundjian's beautifully shaped and sensitive conducting was showcased in a performance of Mahler's First Symphony in the second half of the concert; it featured some notable solos from the double bass and woodwind sections. While most of the orchestral players stayed for the duration of the festival, there were three different concertmasters featured over the six weeks – when I attended the chair was occupied by Kevin Lin, concertmaster of the Indianapolis Symphony since 2020. Just four months earlier, he took possession of the 1683 'ex-Gingold' Stradivari on a three-year loan from the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis – making a neat connection back to Joshua Bell, famously a former pupil of Gingold.

It was truly a privilege to hear the birth of a new work in such an atmosphere of warm collaboration. The capacity festival audience obviously appreciated this too, rising to its feet as one in rapturous applause.

'I'M NOT THE GUY FOR EXTREME AVANT-GARDE MUSIC. I NEVER HAVE BEEN' – *JOSHUA BELL*

GEREMY KORNREICH

JOSEPH CONYERS

# DRIVEN BY MUSIC

Principal double bassist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, teacher, mentor and entrepreneur, Joseph Conyers has a multifaceted career. **David Kettle** speaks to him to discover the source of his boundless energy

Joseph Conyers has just rushed back from the gym when we speak via Zoom. 'I'm actually drinking a protein shake,' he grins, rather sheepishly. 'I was still in the gym seven minutes ago. I didn't quite get to finish my workout, but I ran back and threw on a shirt so I could look half-presentable. I get used to running from one thing to the next.'

Take a look at Conyers's long list of musical activities, and you realise that running between them hardly seems unreasonable. He became principal bassist with the Philadelphia Orchestra earlier this year, having played with the ensemble since 2010. He's an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the UK-based Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective. He runs the music training and mentoring programme Project 440. He teaches at the Juilliard School in New York, and gives masterclasses right across the US. And as if all that weren't enough, he's also a prolific YouTuber and podcaster. How does he manage to cram it all in? I ask him whether he ever thinks to himself: 'Enough!'

'Sometimes!' he laughs. 'I'm human, after all. But generally, I have such enthusiasm for the work I do. I feel like we're living in a world, particularly after the pandemic, where it would be easy to hold up our hands and say: "I've done what I can." I came very close to that way of thinking myself – but the mark I want to leave on this Earth is one that says I did everything I could to try to make it better.'

That might sound slightly sentimental, but Conyers is entirely sincere. While chatting with him, it doesn't take long ▸

NICOLE ROCHE

*‘The mark I want to leave on this Earth is one that says I did everything I could to make it better’*

to appreciate his enormous energy and enthusiasm, and the almost missionary zeal behind what he does. He's a remarkable figure, and he's more than aware, too, that in his current position as a high-profile black orchestral musician he's very much a role model. 'I've got to say, I didn't go into this position expecting that. But I accept the responsibility, because it's important. Representation matters.'

Conyers's earliest contact with music came via his church. 'When someone joins the choir there's no audition – you just come on up and make a joyful noise. That is literally the point of the music: it's about fellowship, family, bringing people together and having a shared experience through shared values and vision.' It gave him, he feels, a particular perspective on his later musical activities. 'I don't come from a classical tradition; neither do my parents and grandparents. I came to music because of my love of music, not my love of classical music.'

That early love of music showed itself in very direct ways. 'My mother tells me that when I was about three, when the washing machine at home was turning, I would be dancing in front of it to its rhythm.' It was Conyers's mother, in fact, who guided her three children towards learning instruments after hearing classical music on the radio and deciding it would be part of their lives. For young Joseph, that first meant piano lessons from the age of five with a local teacher, though it was a slight sense of frustration with family music making that pushed him towards the bass. 'I have a twin sister who played the cello, and an older brother who played the violin – and I played the piano. We were like a little von Trapp family, giving concerts as a trio around our home town of Savannah, Georgia. But as we got older, my brother and sister were always playing with their friends, and going away to rehearsals, and I'd be left practising the piano on my own. I knew I wanted to play something that was part of an ensemble.'

'FOR ME AS A CHILD, THE DOUBLE BASS WAS JUST A LARGER VIOLIN WHERE I COULD ALSO MAKE A PRETTY SOUND. FROM MY FIRST LESSON, I WAS SEARCHING FOR THAT SOUND'

He remembers hearing the Savannah Symphony Orchestra as a child, and falling in love with the sound of the string section. 'For me, the double bass was just a larger violin where I could also make a pretty sound. From my very first lesson, I was trying to do vibrato because I was searching for that sound. I started on the bass in the summer of fifth grade, aged eleven, and it was like a match to gasoline.' ▹

NICOLE ROCHE

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Some in his local community, however, questioned whether music was the right career for the young Conyers. He even began to wonder himself. So much so, in fact, that he considered an alternative course of study. 'It would have been physics and atmospheric science – in other words, meteorology.' The weather, in fact, had been a long and passionate interest of his. 'I remember as a kid becoming a storm spotter for the National Weather Service. Meteorologist Patrick Prokop, on WTOC channel 11, would even mention me on TV, and I'd do rain reports from where I lived.'

It's a passion that continues to this day, Conyers explains. Not for nothing are his social media handles @weatherclef. 'I grew up in a part of the world that gets hurricanes, and to me they were always so beautiful – don't ask me why. But something like that, which can bring a whole city to its knees, you've got to respect. But then for someone who grew up as a Baptist, the hallelujah moment is in the middle of the storm, where it's calm and the sun is out – that just blows my mind.'

His parents, however, recognised his passion for music, and told him he should pursue it. 'I said to myself: I'll see where it takes me.' Where it took him was to Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music – though Conyers had never heard of the place until his penultimate year at high school, when a friend at a summer music festival mentioned it. 'I applied and somehow got in.' It marked the beginning of his long association with Philadelphia that continues to this day – and also, arguably, the beginnings of the kind of outward-looking entrepreneurship that now defines so many of his activities.

First, he was determined to get paid playing work around town while he was studying. 'I'm a pragmatist. I love playing music with all my heart, but I have to eat, and if I can't eat, I can't play music. So I had to figure out a way to support myself: I was practising, playing and networking.' This intense pragmatism about living well – and making a living – as a musician might come, he feels, from his early life. 'My parents were super working class, and I saw early on that you had to invest in yourself. So I came into my field with some talent, but also with the knowledge that I had to be able to help myself.'

Secondly, he ran the Curtis Institute shop, which is a particularly vivid memory for him. 'I was the manager, but they had a lot of old, dingy stuff – sweatshirts from the 1980s that nobody wanted. I don't know why they let me do it, but I got in new clothing with new designs, new hats, bumper stickers, coffee mugs – and all of a sudden, the store was making money.'

It might sound like a form of old-fashioned, take-no-prisoners capitalism, but Conyers is clear about what his brand of entrepreneurship means: 'It's about uniting, and focusing on some common mission. How can I get people together, and get them excited about something we can all do as a team? My kind of entrepreneurship is more of a social one.'

> 'HOW CAN I GET PEOPLE TOGETHER, AND GET THEM EXCITED ABOUT SOMETHING WE CAN ALL DO AS A TEAM? MY KIND OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS MORE OF A SOCIAL ONE'

Jump forward to today, and this kind of pragmatic but driven seeking-out of opportunities – both musical and otherwise – is one of the things that Conyers aims to instil in his students. And, he feels, this broad-focus entrepreneurship is just as important as instrumental ability to a 21st-century musician. 'I can do a great job of teaching you how to play a C major scale or analyse a symphony. But you cannot use that information to pay bills. Unfortunately, there are generations of musicians who have had to learn that the hard way.' ▹

NICOLE ROCHE

Conyers with graduates of his social entrepreneurship scheme, Project 440

One way that Conyers can spread his message is through Project 440, which he co-founded in Savannah in 2007, later relocating it to Philadelphia. Crucially, its aims are to foster community entrepreneurship and leadership alongside developing young people's passion for music. Its Doing Good programme, for example, sends off Philadelphia high-school students to conceive and run large-scale community artistic projects, introducing them to issues of project management, marketing, teamwork, presenting and plenty more.

'One of the things I tell young people is that they don't realise how powerful they are,' Conyers explains. 'And when I start talking about using music as a tool, it's that power that I want to unlock. Some people must think I hate music because I speak so much about possibilities outside it. But it's music that drives all of this.'

Conyers recognises the crucial role played by the Sphinx Organization, which aims to increase representation of black and Latinx artists in classical music (see page 32), in his development as a performer, right from its earliest days. 'I was a semi-finalist in the very first Sphinx Competition, in 1998, and I've been involved with the organisation ever since.' He's aware, too, of the underlying issues that such organisations are aiming to address. 'It's about providing resources to students of colour, so that they have them before they get to auditions. Are there wealthy Hispanic and black players, or families that can afford instruments and training for them? Yes. But because of history, particularly in this country, a lot of those resources have been robbed from those communities. And specific actions have to take place to provide those resources.'

'Blind' orchestral auditions behind screens are all well and good, he says, but they don't address the underlying problems. Typical of Conyers's deep consideration of these issues is the fact that he dismisses sticking-plaster solutions, instead identifying more fundamental questions. Indeed,

'ONE OF THE THINGS I TELL YOUNG PEOPLE IS THAT THEY DON'T REALISE HOW POWERFUL THEY ARE, AND WHEN I START TALKING ABOUT USING MUSIC AS A TOOL, IT'S THAT POWER THAT I WANT TO UNLOCK'

With the Philadelphia Orchestra, where Conyers has played since 2010

TOP PHOTO AL B FOR PHOTOGRAPHY; BOTTOM PHOTO NICOLE ROCHE

one of the aims of his community projects is to begin to address those very problems.

Looking back at his own career, however, he acknowledges that there are other reasons why musicians might not always succeed in auditions. 'There's one American orchestra – I'm not going to name it – that I auditioned for three times, and I never made it past the first round. People just have different ideas about how music should be. If you're a blue player and you're trying to get into a red orchestra, that's just the way it is. But when I won a place with the Philadelphia Orchestra, that legitimised my way of making music.' The Philadelphia position came after earlier roles with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Grand Rapids Symphony (Michigan) and Santa Fe Opera – and, he says, it felt like a homecoming. 'When I was a student at Curtis, I remember seeing the Philadelphia Orchestra at Philadelphia's Academy of Music, and after the concert all the stagehands began to clear up. I thought: "If I could sweep the stage for the Philadelphia Orchestra, I'd be a happy person."'

It never came to that. Conyers was appointed assistant principal bass in 2010, becoming principal in May this year. And as such, he's acutely aware of the orchestra's illustrious performing traditions. 'Our bass playing is very distinctive, and something we've been very proud of. In the past century, bass players like Anton Torello, Roger Scott and Harold Robinson have been the sound of Philadelphia. And now, all of a sudden, I'm principal: it's a little intimidating, a little overwhelming, but also super exciting.'

How does he balance respect for those traditions that produce the orchestra's well-known lustrous string sound with – well, bringing in new ideas? Conyers is diplomatic, but clear. 'For me, all things in life evolve, and traditions evolve too. Even when our music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin began in 2012, he had huge respect for the Philadelphia traditions, but also saw things that could evolve. I always want the best musical product that can be achieved, and I don't want that to suffer because of tradition.'

There's another parallel between Nézet-Séguin and Conyers: both men are committed to physical fitness. Conyers – as we've already heard – is a regular gym visitor, but it goes further than a few casual workouts. 'I've been lifting weights regularly for over 20 years now,' he says. 'When I first started, I was so afraid that as a musician I just wouldn't be able to lift weights. But my parents and my bass teacher were concerned that I was spending so long practising and thought I needed something else in my life. It's been great for me psychologically, and makes for more balance in my life. I try to go first thing in the morning, even if we've got a rehearsal. It just kind of mellows me out, and it helps me sleep. If stressful stuff starts to happen, I can more easily roll over and think: "Whatever happens, I can deal with it."'

Conyers is clearly devoted to and driven by music. But he's also a musician, as he admits, of deep pragmatism – whether that's in harnessing the art form's potential for social change, or simply ensuring physical and mental fitness to perform. And it's those beliefs that motivate him to keep on running – as he has to – from one thing to the next. ●

NICOLE ROCHE

## A BASS CALLED NORMA

'I've had a few basses in my life, and all of them have had names,' Conyers says. 'My Jacquet was Jackie, my Gabrielli copy was Gabby, my Aaron Reiley is – well, Reiley. So it wasn't the most complex formula to come up with a name for Norma.' The Norma in question is Conyers's current instrument, an 1802 bass made in England by Sicilian-born Vincenzo Panormo.

'I first met her in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in autumn 2005, and she was out of my league in every way possible. Definitely in terms of price. So I just stared in awe from afar.' That was until benefactor Edith Blodgett made a generous donation to the Grand Rapids Symphony to enable some of its musicians to purchase instruments. 'That was when the courtship began, but it wasn't until April 2007 that the deal was sealed, and Norma and I became wedded to each other. And I'm sure that for the rest of my career, Norma and I will be playing together.'

What is it that he particularly enjoys about the instrument? 'She has a richness of sound that I've always enjoyed, and it's something I can rest my musical spirit on top of – she really touches my soul. But also – and this sounds terrible – I can be quite an aggressive player, and I put so much energy into my playing, but she just opens her arms wide and says, "Just keep giving me the love." She can have quite a massive sound that I've found very hard to match in any other instrument.' Conyers is mindful, however, that it's the regular playing that keeps Norma herself in shape. 'I put enormous care into her, because she can't take care of herself. I'm just allowing her to continue to vibrate, so that the wood ages with those vibrations and makes her even greater. I feel like I'm just playing my part in allowing her to blossom in this longer story of her life.'

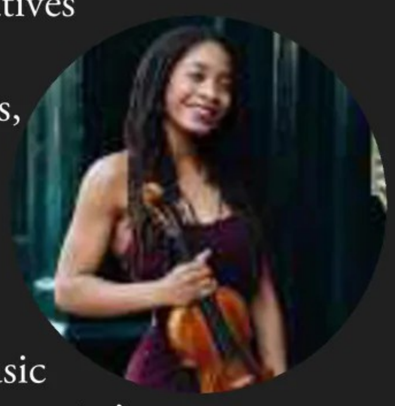
He has two main bows that he uses with his Panormo. 'The first is by Jean Grunberger, which I bought even before I knew Norma – I think I was its first owner. I really like its attack, and the sound that it pulls. I met Grunberger in France, and at least half of the Philadelphia section now plays with one of his sticks. My second bow is a Husson from the early 20th century. It's the first stick I bought to match Norma specifically, because it has great bite but also produces great warmth of sound.'

# CHANGE FOR GOOD

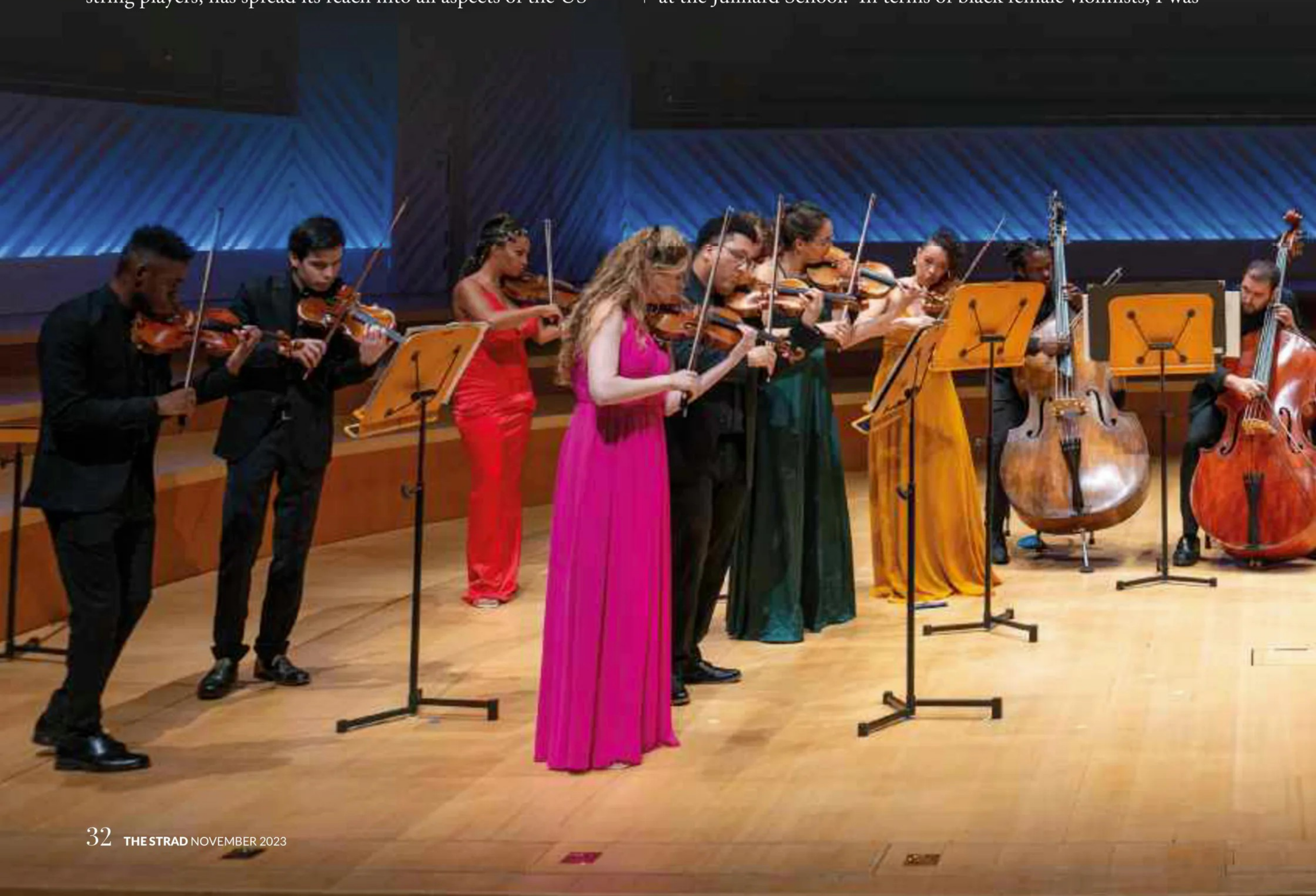
For the past quarter-century the Sphinx Organization has worked tirelessly to bring much-needed diversity to the US classical music scene. **Bruce Hodges** examines its achievements, and hears from its founder and its president about the future

'Classical music is both for us, and by us,' says Aaron P. Dworkin, founder of the Sphinx Organization, which for the past 26 years has been dedicated to increasing the numbers of black and Latinx musicians in classical music. 'I was working on my degree at the University of Michigan, and I went into a lesson one day and my teacher said, "How would you like to play music by black composers?" I never knew there were black composers until that moment,' he recalls. 'I was often the only child of colour playing the violin while growing up.'

From that simple observation came ambition coupled with imagination, and in 1997 Dworkin founded the Sphinx Organization in Detroit, Michigan. Over the past quarter-century the organisation, which began as a competition for string players, has spread its reach into all aspects of the US classical music industry and beyond, with initiatives including youth development, a professional symphony orchestra, string and vocal ensembles, and arts leadership programmes. These days, the efforts are led by Afa Dworkin, also a violinist (and Aaron's wife), who is propelling the organisation into the future.



Afa comments: 'The narrative of classical music would have you believe that it's pretty monochromatic.' Certainly in the past, that has been true. Last April, a feature televised on PBS *NewsHour* had 23-year-old violinist Njioma Chinyere Grevious (*above*) – first prize winner of the 2023 Sphinx Competition senior division, and a founder member of the Abeo Quartet – talking about her years as an undergraduate at the Juilliard School: 'In terms of black female violinists, I was



the only one for quite some time… I've had a lot of support along the way – but it's sort of hard to ignore the lack of "us" on the classical music stage.'

In June, an NBC News profile on Sphinx pointed out that more than 79 per cent of classical orchestral musicians are white, 4.8 per cent are Hispanic or Latinx, and only 2.4 per cent are black (from a survey by the League of American Orchestras). Thanks to the energy of the Dworkins, that era is fading into the background. With its alumni currently numbering more than 1,100, Sphinx is pouring black and Latinx talent into a world that has traditionally been overwhelmingly white.

This metamorphosis – the result of hard work on multiple fronts – is not only changing the way classical music looks, but the way it is perceived, by audiences, musicians and arts administrators. And though the organisation's public face might be best known for its performing group the Sphinx Virtuosi, the ambition and reach extend much further.

Aaron and Afa Dworkin, the founder and the president of the Sphinx Organization

## THE FOUNDERS OF SPHINX

From a vision to increase the numbers of black and Latinx string players, the Dworkins have combined passion, savvy and partnerships, intertwining them to create the powerhouse that is Sphinx today.

Aaron Dworkin describes his early years: 'My violin was my refuge, my solace and my instrument of expression. In many ways, I do feel that it saved my life. I had the good fortune to study the instrument from a very young age with one of the greats of Russian pedagogy, Vladimir Graffman. I was also encouraged by my adoptive mother, Susan, who was an amateur violinist and spotted my early attraction to and affinity for the instrument.

'Through my years at the Interlochen Arts Academy and then onwards to college studies, I had opportunities as a soloist with symphony orchestras as a teen, and received training from dedicated teachers. My initial dream of creating Sphinx was to make opportunities for young people like myself so that, empowered, they could go on to learn, teach, perform and ▸

The Sphinx Virtuosi are the flagship performance group of the Sphinx Organization

SCOTT JACKSON

Children at the César Chávez Academy in Detroit enjoy a Sphinx Overture afterschool violin class

build their own creative enterprises led by diverse voices that make up the rich mosaic of this country.'

A bit of a polymath, Dworkin is also a writer. His sixth book, *The Poetjournalist* (his second book of poetry), was published in May, with a complementary spoken-word recording released on the Azica label. It is clear that his vision and drive are not limited to music, which is one of the reasons that Sphinx has reached its current heights.

Afa Dworkin adds her own story, starting with her childhood in Azerbaijan. 'I fell in love with the violin as a five-year-old and asked for lessons for the next two years. My wonderful non-musician parents did not see much merit in granting the request until my incessant plea reached a certain volume.' When Afa was seven, one of her teachers tested her rhythm and pitch, and lent her a quarter-size violin. 'It would change my life in remarkable ways.' At the age of eleven, she was accepted by the

The members of the Catalyst Quartet, who combine performing with mentoring young musicians

'MY MAIN INSPIRATION CAME FROM THE PURITY AND SIMPLICITY OF AARON'S DREAM'
*– AFA DWORKIN, PRESIDENT*

Azerbaijan State Conservatoire in Baku (now called the Baku Academy of Music).

She and Aaron later met at the University of Michigan, united by their love for the instrument and for discovering new repertoire – works by Saint-Georges, Still, David Baker and Roque Cordero. 'My main inspiration came from the purity and beautiful simplicity of Aaron's dream,' she explains. 'I fell in love with the artists and the artistry of the first generation of Sphinx Competition alumni, among them bassist Joseph Conyers (see page 24) and violinist Melissa White. I saw something that transcends the construct of historical and societally imposed barriers, and today, seeing this dream come closer and closer to reality is a privilege.'

Afa adds words of gratitude and talks of creating the right environment for artists to resonate and become leaders. 'I am constantly challenged and inspired to do more, and I feel

OVERTURE PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC NEWS. CATALYST PHOTO RICARDO QUINONES

fortunate to do this work in partnership with our incredible team at Sphinx, who share Aaron's original dream and our collective commitment to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts.'

## NUTS AND BOLTS: THE SPHINX PROCESS

The organisation reaches children early, starting with Sphinx Overture and then Sphinx Performance Academy, designed to jump-start young players in Detroit and Flint, Michigan. Another star of the aforementioned PBS feature was nine-year-old violinist Taniel Hernandez, who attends the Detroit charter school the César Chávez Academy and loves to play the Mexican folk song *De colores* to his mother while she's cooking. When asked why he likes that piece, he replies with matter-of-fact simplicity, 'It's a little bit challenging, but I still can do it.' He already dreams of being a professional violinist.

Sphinx encourages and nurtures those challenges. When students are ready, they can enter the Sphinx Competition, perhaps the core of the entire organisation. There are two divisions: junior, for age 17 and under; senior, for ages 18 to 30. In addition to the competition itself, Sphinx's holistic concept combines masterclasses, panel discussions and other events with actual performing experience, to give musicians a real-world grasp on what it takes to form a career. Whether students want to play in an orchestra, prefer chamber music or want to take flight in a solo career, Sphinx encourages all with a phalanx of programmes and ensembles.

Reflecting the organisation in its original guise, strings remain at its core, notably the high-profile Sphinx Virtuosi. In addition, the Harlem and Catalyst quartets offer concerts and serve as mentors and teaching artists to many students of different backgrounds across the country. Sphinx's opportunities now extending beyond the string world include the Sphinx Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble that meets annually and comprises professional musicians from around the US. For singers, there's the Exigence vocal ensemble (its name derived from 'an urgent need or demand'), which was founded by its conductor, Eugene Rogers, another University of Michigan graduate.

To complete the galaxy of Sphinx initiatives are programmes in arts leadership which prepare and encourage black and Latinx musicians to assume positions of responsibility in the American arts landscape – whether as programme creators, arts administrators or other advocates. The two-year Sphinx Lead programme melds mentorship, networking and leadership retreats to prepare the next generation of industry executives.

Above all, Sphinx addresses the need for deep, comprehensive change in all musical institutions, and the proof in numbers is staggering: not only does the organisation boast more than 1,100 black and Latinx alumni, but also it has invested more than $10 million in the careers of these classical musicians and has a digital audience of more than 66 million people.

## AND NOW A MILESTONE: THE FIRST ALBUM

In a stunning debut on the venerable DG label, recorded in March and April 2023, the Sphinx Virtuosi present an invigoratingly unorthodox programme – with just a nod to a composer of the classical music canon: Beethoven. The hour of music on the album makes up a powerful catalogue of vital black and Latinx voices. ▹

NOT ONLY DOES THE SPHINX ORGANIZATION BOAST MORE THAN 1,100 BLACK AND LATINX ALUMNI, BUT IT HAS INVESTED MORE THAN $10 MILLION IN THE CAREERS OF THESE CLASSICAL MUSICIANS

The Sphinx Virtuosi recently released their debut album on the DG label

VIRTUOSI PHOTO SCOTT JACKSON

Among the many composers with Sphinx backgrounds is Jessie Montgomery (*left*), also a violinist, whose works are often performed by Sphinx ensembles and who was the organisation's first composer-in-residence. She offers a work for cello solo and strings (*Divided* – 2020) which showcases the talents of Sphinx Virtuosi's Thomas Mesa, a Cuban–American cellist and Sphinx Competition laureate from 2016. Flautist and composer Valerie Coleman has had several Sphinx commissions over the years, and her latest one is the string orchestra work *Tracing Visions* (2022), rooted in the violence enacted on Emmett Till in 1955 and the recent school massacre in Uvalde, Texas.

Carlos Simon, a composer and 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence recipient, penned *Between Worlds* (2019) for solo violin, and it receives an impressive reading here by the young musician Amaryn Olmeda, born in 2008 and first prize winner in the junior division of the 2021 Sphinx Competition. With an 1864 Vuillaume instrument, she shows why she has garnered the word 'prodigy'.

And if not every composer on the recording is of Sphinx lineage, the others are congruent with the organisation's mission, such as Ricardo Herz from Brazil, Aldemaro Romero from Venezuela and Florence Price, who is finally getting her due. Even the Beethoven (the finale of Violin Sonata no.9) is an arrangement by Venezuelan violinist Rubén Rengel (who is currently on the Sphinx Soloist Program) in honour of its original dedicatee, George Bridgetower, a British violinist of African ancestry.

## COMMENTS FROM THE CONCERTMASTER

Among the album's many delectable turns are those by Alex Gonzalez (*right*), the Sphinx Virtuosi's concertmaster, who plays a 2017 violin by the renowned California-based luthier Mario Miralles. Gonzalez speaks thoughtfully about his development, and the rocket fuel afforded by early educational experiences: 'My musical journey began when I started learning the piano at age eight. When I was eleven years old, I picked up the violin for the first time through my public middle school's orchestra programme and never looked back. During my studies, I was lucky to have been mentored by Shakeh Ghoukasian, Oleh Krysa, Paul Kantor and Cyrus Forough.'

As is the case for many in the Sphinx orbit, Gonzalez's talents have led to involvement elsewhere, including past engagements as concertmaster, both for the London-based Chineke! Orchestra, and for the New World Symphony, based in Miami.

GONZALES PHOTO JAY SORIANO. MONTGOMERY PHOTO JIYANG CHEN

'I WILL NEVER FORGET WALKING OFF STAGE AFTER MY SEMI-FINAL ROUND AND BEING GREETED WITH CHEERS, HUGS AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM MY FELLOW COMPETITORS'
*– ALEX GONZALES, CONCERTMASTER, SPHINX VIRTUOSI*

The Sphinx Virtuosi have an increasing international profile; they made their debut at Snape Maltings, UK, this summer

Afa (*far left*) and Aaron (*far right*) Dworkin with laureates of the 2023 Sphinx Competition: (*l–r*) cellist Brandon Leonard, violinists Alejandra Switala and Njioma Grevious, and violist Dillon Scott

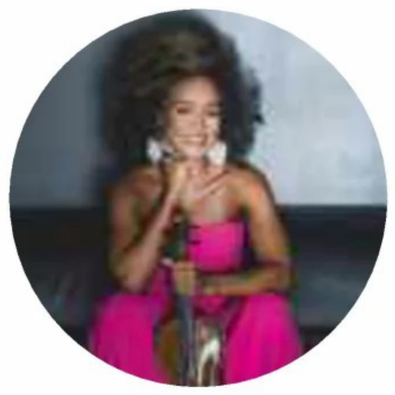
Currently he plays with the renowned New York orchestral collective The Knights, and teaches at the University of Colorado Boulder.

As it did for many others, Sphinx changed Gonzalez's life. He describes what it was like to be part of the event: 'Like any competition, I arrived feeling the usual nerves, pressure and stress that come along with such an event. Trying to stay focused and play my best was my only priority. I will never forget walking off stage after playing my semi-final round and being greeted with cheers, hugs and words of encouragement from all of my fellow competitors.'

## TO NEW YORK, VIA SNAPE – AND BEYOND

The Sphinx Virtuosi made their UK debut in July this year at Snape Maltings in Suffolk, and their autumn tour reaches a climax in October, when the ensemble presents a concert at Carnegie Hall in tandem with its annual gala. The typically eclectic programme includes works by cellists Andrea Casarrubios, Abel Selaocoe and Quenton Xavier Blache, and double bassist Xavier Foley.

Throughout the classical music world, Sphinx alumni are quickly populating the field's upper echelons. Prominent Sphinx veterans include Joseph Conyers, who was recently appointed principal double bass in the Philadelphia Orchestra – the orchestra's first black principal musician; and cellist Sterling Elliott, first prize winner in the senior division of the 2019 Sphinx Competition, who has been chosen for a three-year residency at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and will perform with the Sphinx Virtuosi both in New York and on tour.



Another high-profile Sphinx alumnus, violinist Randall Goosby (see September 2023 cover story), has introduced listeners to Price's violin concertos, collaborating with conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra. And violinist Melissa White (*above right*), a founder member of the Harlem Quartet, teaches at New York University, the University at Buffalo and the Sarasota Music Festival. On her website, White's enthusiasm is palpable, whether she's talking about her c.1780 instrument made by Ferdinando Gagliano, or playfully inviting audiences to 'enjoy a little black girl magic'.

When someone mentions the word 'sphinx', many people's thoughts drift to a 4,500-year-old monument in Giza. But for many people today, the word conjures up the strength of a revolution in musical identity and influence – a beacon that has challenged the field's sometimes hidebound traditions. If Egypt is home to a silent wonder of the world from the past, the Sphinx Organization is its radical opposite: a testament to – and an explosion of – the musical wonders of the 21st century. ●

WHITE PHOTO DARIO ACOSTA. VIRTUOSI PHOTO SCOTT JACKSON

# THE *FULL MONTY*

For the past few years, the attendees of the annual Oberlin Violin Makers Workshop have set themselves increasingly challenging group projects. **Robin Aitchison** explains how 30 luthiers collaborated on their latest task: to copy a Montagnana cello with pinpoint accuracy

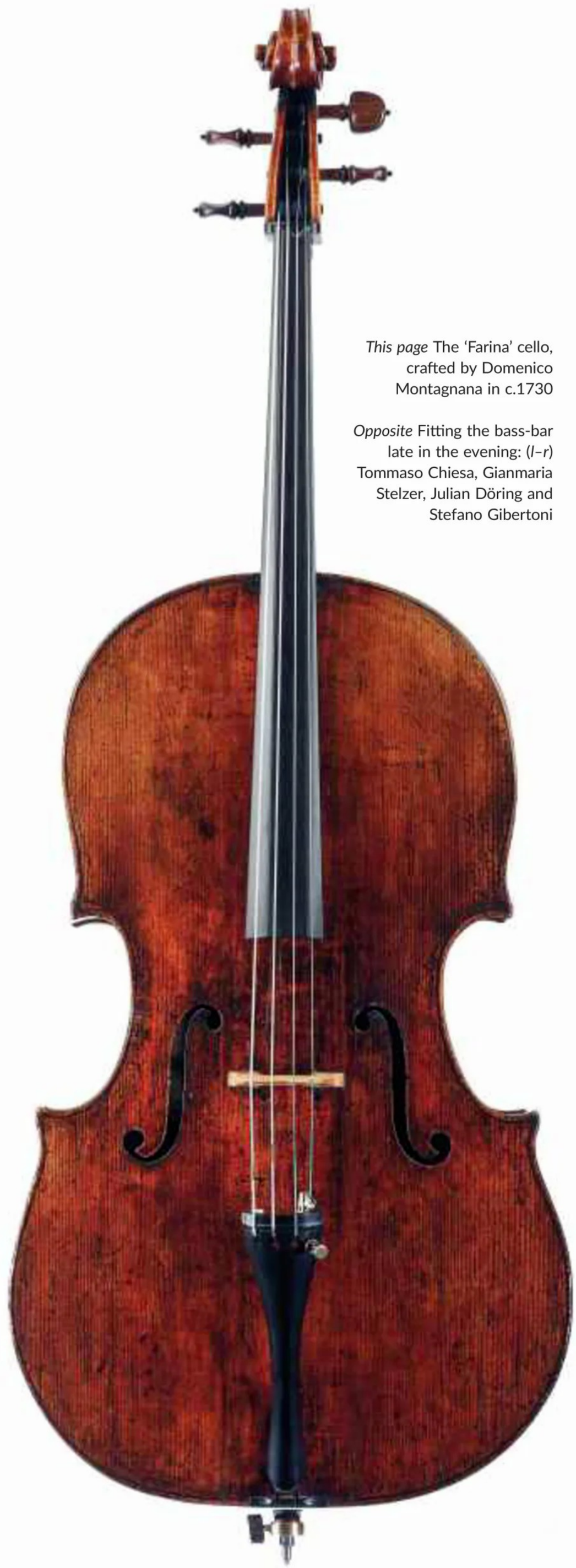
Every June, the VSA Oberlin Violin Makers Workshop brings together luthiers from all over the world to work on joint woodwork and varnish projects, with the expectation that 'everyone teaches, everyone learns'. When Oberlin's director Christopher Germain suggested that 2023 might be a good year for me to lead a cello making project, I knew I was in for a steep learning curve.

The first challenge was to find an inspiring cello to use as our model. Marinos Glitsos, a new face in Oberlin, suggested we should consider the c.1730 'Farina', a Montagnana once owned by the British cellist May Mukle and now played by Ilya Finkelshteyn, principal cellist of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (CSO). When I visited Ilya and heard him play the cello, I realized what an ideal subject it would be for our project. The voice of the 'Farina' is exceptional (Ilya describes it as having the depth and resonance of a Montagnana and the 'sizzle' of a Strad). And, significantly, it has escaped the knives and saws of earlier generations and retains its original dimensions, unlike most other Montagnana cellos which have been cut down in size, mostly during the 19th century, to suit contemporary fashions and tastes.

Fortunately, both Ilya and the CSO were very supportive of the project, so in March this year I met Benjamin Ruth, project co-principal, for three days of detailed study and measurement in Cincinnati. Ilya kindly gave up the use of his cello during this period and the CSO accommodated us in free spaces around their historic concert hall.

We used both modern and traditional methods to document the cello, thanks to Cincinnati University Hospital, which carried out a CT scan of the cello during our stay. CT scans are a tremendous resource for the study of stringed instruments, particularly for qualitative understanding. When viewing a 'slice' through an instrument, it's possible to see the outside arch, the inside arch and the progression of the thicknessing simultaneously. CT scan data can also be used to produce valuable 3D reference materials. However, we felt it was also essential to measure the cello using traditional methods, as many measurements such as plate thicknesses, as well as f-hole rubbings and outline tracings, are far easier and quicker to record the old-fashioned way. ▹

Robin Aitchison reinstates the set-up on the 'Farina' after the CT scan, with Ilya Finkelshteyn looking on



*This page* The 'Farina' cello, crafted by Domenico Montagnana in c.1730

*Opposite* Fitting the bass-bar late in the evening: (*l–r*) Tommaso Chiesa, Gianmaria Stelzer, Julian Döring and Stefano Gibertoni

'FARINA' PHOTO TOM WALLACE. CT SCAN PHOTO BENJAMIN RUTH. OPPOSITE PHOTO DAVID VAN ZANDT

As well as gathering data, we wanted to understand as much as possible about the cello before making a practice copy at my workshop in Ely, UK, in preparation for the Oberlin project. In particular, we were looking for clues as to the secret of the cello's extraordinary functionality and survival. What happy combination of parameters had allowed this cello to escape being 'cut down' when so many like it had required surgery to remain viable players' instruments?

Where wood selection was concerned, our CT scan density estimates revealed that the front is nice and light at 0.36g/cm$^3$, while at 0.53g/cm$^3$ the wood of the maple back and ribs is exceptionally light. In terms of design, although the 'Farina' is at the larger end of the spectrum of surviving uncut Montagnana cellos, the width across the C-bouts is fairly moderate and the transition at the upper corners adds significant structural stiffness. But the biggest surprise of the measuring trip was discovering that the 'Farina' has very thick ribs: between 2 and 2.5mm! According to all received wisdom, thick cello ribs are *bad* for sound. However, in this case, combined with the light wood and other vibrational freedoms inherent to the model, we believe that these thick ribs contribute to the stiffness of the cello body in an entirely positive way.

Back in Ely, my assistant Laurence Howe and I started work on a three-part mould. This is my favoured approach for copying classical period cellos, which often show a big variation in the outline shapes from front to back. In April, Benjamin arrived in Ely for two weeks, during which time we aimed to produce templates for the project and then build a practice 'Farina' copy in the white. Thanks to Harry Mairson of Brandeis University, we had a scaled-down 3D print of the cello, a full-size 3D print of the scroll and a set of full-size regular prints of selected cross-sections through the cello. These were an invaluable addition to our analogue measurements, from which we created a complete set of arching, scroll and f-hole templates and radius guides for use in Ely and Oberlin. Through this work, it became clear that Montagnana made extensive use of circle arcs to shape his arching, particularly in the back lower bouts where the arc extended to nearly three-quarters of the width of the cello. After Benjamin's return to the US, I completed the woodwork, varnish and set-up in time to take the practice cello to Oberlin in early June.

Meanwhile, other Oberliners were swinging into action, including Raymond Schryer who sourced the maple and spruce for the Oberlin copy. Plates were jointed, neck components machined up, and linings prepared. To provide the project with the equivalent of plaster casts, Raymond used our CT scan data to make full-size recreations of the original front and back of the cello from spruce and maple, using a CNC router, cutting both on the outside and the inside of the plates. These plates proved to be a fascinating resource.

There might be those who would ask how it's possible to involve 30 people in making a single cello. The tried and tested approach in Oberlin is to divide the process up into distinct stages, each led by an experienced luthier. Our pedagogical mission means that team leaders can't just select the most experienced makers to join them, as the aim is to get the job done while allowing a range of participants to share the learning experience. To save time, I decided to recruit team leaders and to invite participants to volunteer for each team, all in advance of the workshop. The challenge of running a group project is that everyone has their own way of doing things and their own vocabulary for expressing what they do. Effective communication is key.

Over the weekend of 10–11 June, 69 luthiers arrived in Oberlin from all over the world. Alongside the 'Farina' Montagnana copy, Oberliners would be working on a 'free-form violin' project: to design and build two violins with different tonal objectives without the aid of any graduated measuring devices. There was also the varnish project for the 2022 group violin, the 1703 'De Rougemont' Stradivari.

Michael Doran and the rib structure team agreed to start work early on the day before the programme started, so by Monday they were gluing in C-bout ribs and on Tuesday the outer ribs. To add to the excitement, Ilya and his wife, Evin Blomberg, arrived on Tuesday morning, just eight days after their wedding. Ilya played an impromptu recital in the workshop and described his long search for a cello, which had ended when he took the 'Farina' out on trial. The orchestra's feedback about the 'Farina' sound was unanimously positive,

Two magnifications of the varnish on the 'Farina' back, showing different forms of craquelure

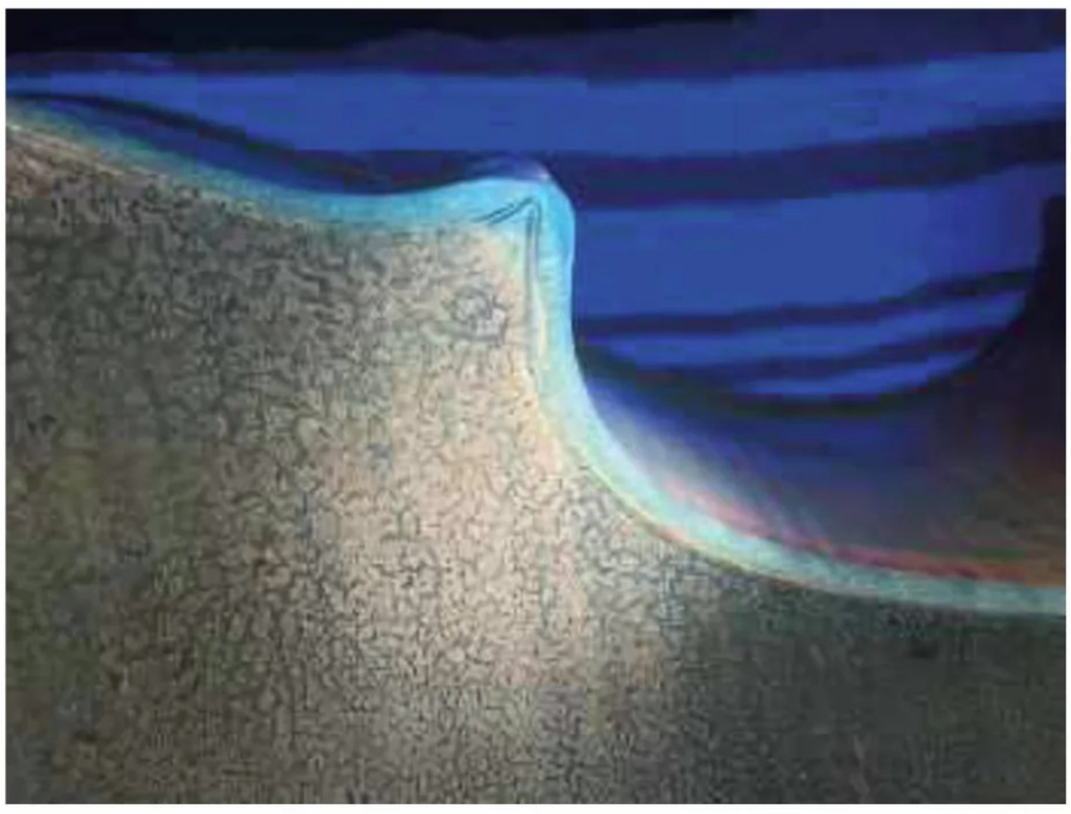
PHOTOS JULIAN DÖRING

and Ilya believes that the cello's tonal presence has since transformed the bass sound of the CSO.

Ilya, Evin and the 'Farina' were with us for two very full days of study and performance and every luthier on the project made the most of this remarkable opportunity. The protocols for the group study of irreplaceable antique instruments in Oberlin are well established. A quiet room is set aside for the instrument which is supported safely in a cradle on a stable surface, handled only by a few designated handlers and visited by small groups, following a strict timetable. Nothing is allowed to be held vertically above the instrument and the number of people in the room is carefully controlled.

First-hand experience of an instrument such as the 'Farina' is always inspiring for luthiers, particularly when their task is to make a very close copy. Daniel Gillespie describes the effect on him: 'It was very exciting to see the instrument, so bold and asymmetric, the varnish so colourful and textured. You can look at photos all you like, but you don't really get the full impact of this large unconventional-looking instrument until you see it for real. Seeing it in person also gave me a sense of how challenging it would be to replicate. Every minuscule thing must be thought about.'

Extra study time was allocated to the varnish examination team led by Mark Schnurr and Julian Döring. Using daylight and ultraviolet light, the team examined every area of the varnish on the 'Farina', which is in a very good state of ▸



*Above* 'Farina' back varnish surface at the upper treble corner, in natural light
*Below* Back varnish at the lower treble corner, under UV light

BACK PHOTO TOM WALLACE. VARNISH PHOTOS JULIAN DÖRING

'YOU DON'T REALLY GET THE FULL IMPACT OF THIS LARGE UNCONVENTIONAL-LOOKING INSTRUMENT UNTIL YOU SEE IT FOR REAL'
— *DANIEL GILLESPIE*

Back of the 'Farina' cello

Ilya Finkelshteyn plays in the concert hall at Oberlin

‘THE “FARINA” SOUND IS SO MUCH BIGGER, MORE BEAUTIFUL AND INTENSE THAN I EVER EXPECTED’ *– UTE ZAHN*

preservation with a deep patina adding considerable depth and darkness in places. Particular attention was given to areas of eroded varnish where it’s possible to see its structure, layer by layer, from bare wood, to wood still protected by the clear varnish coat, to the coloured varnish and the layer of patina on the very top.

Mark observed that the whole varnish system appeared to be thinner and more delicate than he expected, especially given the density of colour: ‘The appearance of thickness is amplified by the craquelure on the back, and it is substantial, but it didn’t feel like a heavily coated oily varnish.’ Julian was happy to see an instrument with so much original, pure, unpolished varnish. ‘Under the UV light you can see the pale/yellowish fluorescence of the clear coat and the salmon pink appearance of the coloured varnish,’ he observed. ‘We were interested to see that the clear coat is relatively thin compared to other old Venetian instruments, and the wood looked much paler than you would expect.’

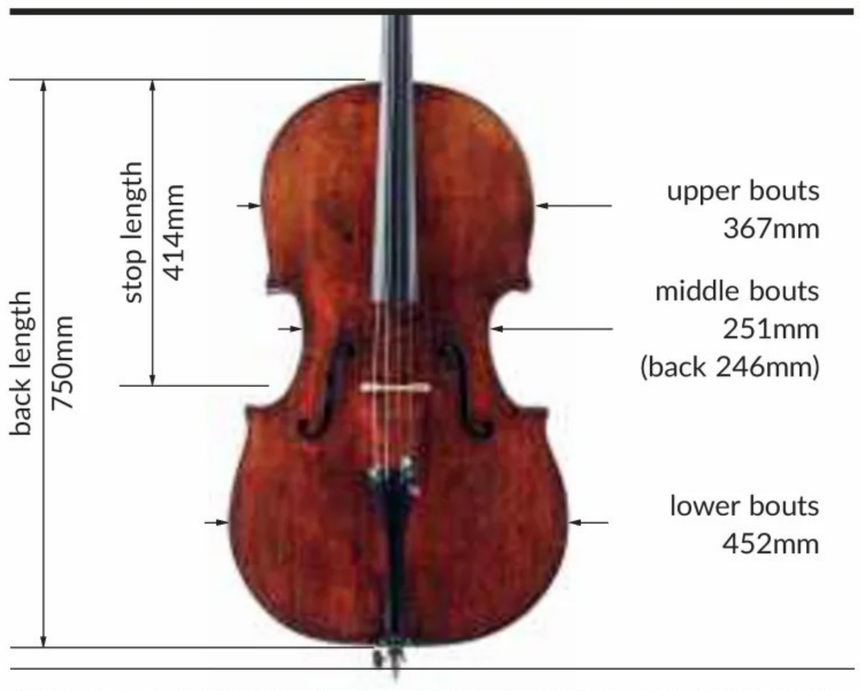
The varnish team built up colour samples on prepared rib wood, to help with colour matching in 2024, as no photograph could represent the three-dimensional nature of the varnish or record the colour reliably. With next year’s antiquing challenge in mind, they also created Polycam 3D images of the cello ribs as well as macro photography of the craquelure.

On the Wednesday afternoon Ilya performed on the ‘Farina’ in an Oberlin concert hall, accompanied by Evin on the exceptional Stradivari and ‘del Gesù’ violins belonging to William Sloan, a long-time friend of the programme. In the hall, the cello created an extraordinary warm and enveloping resonance, which Ilya focused into the most exquisitely intense colours. Ute Zahn commented, ‘The sound was so much bigger, more beautiful and intense than I had ever expected. It makes you realise what the fuss is all about!’

The CNC-routed reproduction of the ‘Farina’ back is clamped to a flat board and pulled down in the soundpost position

PHOTOS DAVID VAN ZANDT

Peter Bingen works on the scroll, referring closely to the 3D print




All measurements taken with callipers apart from the stop length, which was taken with a tape measure

## TEAMS AND THEIR LEADERS

**Rib structure** Michael Doran
**Varnish study** Mark Schnurr
**Outlines and purfling** Ute Zahn
**Arching** Rainer Beilharz
**Thicknessing** Peter Goodfellow
**F-holes** Daniel Gillespie
**Scroll** Peter Bingen
**Patch and bass-bar** Julian Döring
**Second front** Andreas Hudelmayer

After Ilya's visit and the completion of the study phase, work proceeded with extraordinary energy. Back in the main workshop, the rib structure had been completed and passed to Ute and her helpers who worked on the front and back outlines and purfling. The joy of the Oberlin environment is that you can trust your fellow Oberliners, knowing that they are hugely talented and determined to give their best to the programme.

For the arching process, Rainer Beilharz decided to work with his team in a separate area with lower light levels, and with space to spread out tools, arching guides, the reference CNC plates and the practice cello. Priority was given to arching the front to allow time for cutting the f-holes and fitting a bass-bar and soundpost patch. It was imperative to get this work down the line to the thicknessing team, led by Peter Goodfellow, as soon as possible. They kept diligent records of all the steps in the thicknessing process as they worked to balance the free plate tones, weights and the overall stiffness of the plates within the context of the thickness patterns of the original cello.

A chance conversation over breakfast between Andreas Hudelmayer, Rainer Beilharz and Raymond Schryer led to a spontaneous moment of creative thinking. They were discussing possible ways to discover the original shape of a stringed instrument before it was subject to historic distortion, when they realised that they had a golden opportunity to work with Raymond's CNC-routed reference plates. A new team of enthusiasts coalesced around the idea and the plates were clamped on to rigid plywood boards cut to the outline shape, pulled down at the soundpost position and pushed up at the bridge position. The result for the front was so compelling in terms of producing a different, higher, but entirely credible arch that the group committed to the idea of making an alternative front for the cello, so that the sound of the two fronts can eventually be compared on the finished instrument.

Soon we were off to buy tonewood for the second front. A rather fresh double bass top was deemed to be the best spruce in town, and by the next day it was machined, jointed, sawn out, rough-arched, rough-thicknessed and set to dry in a lightbox. As Peter Goodfellow said: where else would you find such energy, expertise and enthusiasm?

Towards the end of the programme the evening sessions in the workshop get longer, with a party atmosphere and plenty of music making. In the midst of this, Peter Bingen finished carving the scroll and Julian Döring and Peter Goodfellow's teams coordinated over finalising the front and back. Then all the components were glued to precisely cut plywood support boards for stability throughout the year.

It would be fair to say that the Oberlin workshop never sleeps. Mark Schnurr has picked up the 'Farina' project baton and will prepare the original plates for varnishing and antiquing next year. Bill Scott has agreed to put the finishing touches to the second top plate so that, if all goes well, we might hear not one but two voices from our copy of the 'Farina' Montagnana, an exceptional uncut gem of the Venetian school. The project leaders extend their huge thanks to everyone involved for their dedication and enthusiasm. ●

*The author wishes to thank his wife, the poet Sarah Mnatzaganian, for co-writing this article with him*

BINGEN PHOTO DAVID VAN ZANDT. FARINA PHOTO TOM WALLACE

# DREAMING IN COLOUR

**The Solem Quartet's violist Stephen Upshaw talks to Harry White about the themes of light, shade and perspective that link the works on the ensemble's album of 20th-century and contemporary music**

Some albums are the result of an artist's compulsion to record a particular work. Others begin conceptually, with an idea from which the repertoire is drawn. Regardless of the process, there is inevitably symbiosis between concept and repertoire.

In the case of *Painted Light*, the Solem Quartet's first album with Delphian, the question of which came first is an interesting one. All under the somewhat nebulous themes of 'colour, light and shade', the album testifies to the group's reputation for diverse programming. Recorded at Willards Farm in Dunsfold, Surrey, it is a potpourri of contemporary commissions, historic 20th-century repertoire, and Joni Mitchell's seminal song *Both Sides Now*, arranged by the quartet's violinist William Newell.

'As we often do when starting a project, we began exchanging ideas about dream repertoire, and natural threads between the kinds of music began to emerge,' explains violist Stephen Upshaw. 'This sort of big-picture thinking often creates sparks that lead to a dynamic collective vision.' So, as particular works were put forward, a concept developed that began to inform the rest of the album. 'The concept strongly informed repertoire choices,' explains Upshaw. 'Edmund Finnis's glowing String Quartet no.3 is the most recently composed work on the album [2022], and we were certain we wanted to include this. We also wanted another quartet, *The Blue Windows* by Camden Reeves, which was written for us in 2019 and has clear themes relating to colour and light.' It was this choice that consolidated the album's theme, leading to the inclusion of the impressionistic quartet by Henriëtte Bosmans (1927) and Lili Boulanger's *Nocturne* (1911), in addition to the Mitchell and Ayanna Witter-Johnson's *Earth* (2018) – recorded here for the first time and on which the composer joins as vocalist – both of which Upshaw says deal with 'light, shade and perspective'.

'CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ALLOWS US TO REFLECT A WIDE ARRAY OF VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES THAT ECHO THE WORLD WE LIVE IN' – *STEPHEN UPSHAW, VIOLA*

Regardless of the album's genesis, the Solem Quartet's predilection for clarity, precision and timbral diversity suggests the musicians' 'dream repertoire' is coloured by a particular affinity with contemporary repertoire. 'Contemporary music is very important because it allows us to reflect a wide array of voices and perspectives that echo the world we live in,' explains Upshaw. 'We also feel strongly that supporting artists of our generation is very important. Stylistically, the many works that have come out of our commissioning projects vary widely and we love that. We choose to work with composers based on who we feel has a clear and compelling voice, not based on predetermined aesthetic ideas. Having said that, we explore repertoire ranging from William Byrd to Kate Bush, looking for music that excites and challenges us. As long as those two points are in place, when the music was written is secondary.'

A composition commission from a solo artist often catalyses a process between soloist and composer that is rich in politics and diplomacy, involving back-and-forth, workshopping and often a degree of compromise. With two pieces on the album commissioned by the quartet (those by Finnis and Reeves), how does this process translate to an ensemble of four voices plus composer? 'It's very much the same thing,' says Upshaw. 'Where possible, we will work with a composer on their ideas to help inform the final piece. The process is very democratic as we all have a great deal of experience and respect for

ALL PHOTOS FOXBRUSH.CO.UK

each other, and we're each an expert at our instrumental role so can speak with autonomy about how a composition works in terms of our individual part. We also share responsibility for providing feedback about musical ideas and techniques with the composer in order to create the strongest outcome. Something else we feel strongly about is not influencing the composer's artistic ideas before they begin to write. We very rarely, if ever, provide a specific brief, leaving it to the composer to come to us with the ideas they are inspired by. We find this approach yields the most original and rewarding music.'

The Solem Quartet recording at Willards Farm: (*l–r*) Amy Tress, William Newell, Stephen Upshaw, Stephanie Tress

The recording venue, a converted barn at Willards Farm, proved ideal both practically and artistically. 'One of our biggest considerations was needing somewhere within commuting distance to our homes in London due to family commitments,' explains Upshaw. 'In this way, Dunsfold worked out well for travelling by car to the venue each day. We found the space thanks to suggestions by musicians who had previously recorded there, and were fortunate enough to know a colleague who lives at the property. It was lovely to see her and her family during breaks while we were there. It really did feel like a musical haven tucked away in the countryside, which is a wonderful environment to record in. Like many venues in proximity to a major city, we sometimes did have to wrestle with air traffic noise, but we were lucky that our engineer and producer Paul Baxter had the skill to get us to a beautiful result.' And how did the venue present itself acoustically? 'We always strive to find a space that allows us the precision and diversity of sound we need,' says Upshaw. 'Somewhere with too much resonance would make this difficult. It was clear from the outset that Willards was going to meet these requirements, as its acoustic would facilitate the sounds we wanted to create.'

Individual members of quartets often have different considerations when it comes to recording. How did the group reconcile the needs of individuals against the interests of the whole and the practical restraints of a recording schedule? 'Fortunately, we have a lot of practice when it comes to unifying our schedules with early starts on tour, long journeys, encouraging patience and focus ahead of tea breaks and the like,' Upshaw explains. 'So, switching into recording mode and recognising when the group needs to take a break to rest and recaffeinate is something we're well versed in! In the day-to-day life of a quartet, reading wordless signals is just as valuable for knowing when someone needs a breather as it is in relation to phrasing and bowing.'

Historically, classical artists have ventured into popular-music programming with mixed results. But more recently, it appears that classically trained musicians enjoy an instinctive open-mindedness that allows for the exploration of popular music with integrity. 'Joni Mitchell is an artist we all love and respect enormously,' says Upshaw. 'When it came to thinking for a way to close the album, the visual idea of shifting perspective paired with the emotional weight of the song seemed like a natural fit for *Painted Light*. We love both versions Mitchell has recorded of this song, which provide incredible lessons in the power of arrangement and vocal performance. The 1969 recording is knowing but has a carefree air; whereas the 2000 interpretation, complete with Vince Mendoza's jazz harmonies and rich orchestral scoring, is full of wisdom with perhaps a tinge of regret.

'The change of colour in Mitchell's voice between the two performances was an inspiration in itself, and we wanted to imbue the two in the arrangement; to find moments of purity and innocence but also include the richness and emotional density of Mitchell's later years.'

*Painted Light* is therefore neither a repertoire nor concept project. It is, rather, a child born from the quartet's fierce commitment to fresh perspectives. 'Ultimately,' says Upshaw, 'we're interested in music that exists on the borders – music on the verge of one style and another, one kind of sound and another; like things brought together by a painter manipulating watercolour to create something that the eye has never seen before.'

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WORKS **Bosmans** String Quartet **Finnis** String Quartet no.3 'Devotions' **L. Boulanger arr. Solem Quartet** Nocturne **Reeves** The Blue Windows (String Quartet no.5) **Mitchell arr. Solem Quartet** Both Sides Now **Witter-Johnson** Earth
ARTISTS **Solem Quartet, Ayanna Witter-Johnson (voice)**
RECORDING VENUE **Willards Farm, Dunsfold, Surrey, UK**
RECORDING DATES **1–3 February 2023**
CATALOGUE NUMBER **Delphian DCD34308**
RELEASE DATE **27 October 2023**

The current Kronos line-up: (*l–r*) violist Hank Dutt, violinists John Sherba and David Harrington, and cellist Paul Wiancko

# HUNGER FOR THE NEW

Kronos Quartet has been at the vanguard of contemporary string quartet performance for 50 years. Founder David Harrington and former cellist Joan Jeanrenaud speak with **Thomas May** about the legacy of innovation that the ensemble is celebrating with an ambitious series of projects this season

LENNY GONZALEZ

Ask violinist David Harrington what he's listening to these days, and you'll get an instant glimpse into the insatiable hunger for discovery that defines and fuels Kronos Quartet, the trailblazing ensemble he founded in 1973. With Kronos Quartet, it's the ears that are the window to the soul.

'I just heard an absolutely amazing radio programme from 1953. It was Studs Terkel interviewing Lorenzo Dow Turner, the first great African American linguist,' Harrington says during a Zoom conversation from his home in San Francisco. 'It was incredibly beautiful. This is leading me into an entirely new, major work as soon as I can do it. I'm as on fire as I can be right now.'

In genuine Kronos style, Harrington's enthusiasm is infectious – notwithstanding my ignorance of Turner's achievements. In the historic Terkel programme, I later discover, Turner discusses music along with his breakthrough research into the Gullah language of the American coastal south and his travels in Nigeria. An encounter with the Kronos Quartet can be relied on to ignite one's own curiosity, whisking it off in multiple directions at once.

This open-eared attitude has sustained Kronos's stature as an influential force for innovation for half a century now. The astonishing scope of the quartet's commitment to contemporary music is evident from the sheer variety and breadth of its programmes marking the 50th-anniversary season now under way, which the group has dubbed Kronos Five Decades.

For the year-long celebration (July 2023 to June 2024), Kronos – whose members, along with Harrington, include violinist John Sherba, violist Hank Dutt and cellist Paul Wiancko – is undertaking a global tour and will appear at 50 events, among them concerts at London's Barbican Hall (21 October) and at Carnegie Hall in New York (3 November). A residency at the Paris Philharmonie during the String Quartet Biennial (12–13 January 2024) will feature Kronos together with other participating ensembles in a marathon performance of the entire body of its '50 for the Future' repertoire. These 50 works were created between 2015 and 2021, a series of

Kronos in 1979 (*l–r*) Hank Dutt, cellist Joan Jeanrenaud, David Harrington and John Sherba

commissions from well-known as well as emerging composers which have been made available through an open-access library intended to aid quartets and students in honing techniques essential for 21st-century repertoire.

The Kronos Five Decades tour juxtaposes music by composers with whom the quartet has been closely associated for most of its history, such as Terry Riley and Philip Glass, with a series of ten works newly commissioned for the anniversary from composers across the globe (some of them long-term partners with Kronos, others collaborating for the first time) and premiered on various programmes throughout the season.

Recording is also central to Kronos's artistic work. It is hard to overstate the role that the group's discography of more than seventy albums has played in establishing its reputation. Kronos has sold more than four million CDs, which is widely believed to be more than any other string quartet in history – a fact that challenges the myth that audiences find new music 'inaccessible'. Kronos Five Decades therefore encompasses five releases, three of which are brand-new recordings (*Campaign Songs* by Michael Gordon; *Songs and Symphoniques: The Music of Moondog*, a collaboration with Brooklyn-based Ghost Train Orchestra ▹

Kronos at the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix, Arizona

'I'M AS ON FIRE AS I CAN BE RIGHT NOW'
*– DAVID HARRINGTON, VIOLIN*

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**Choong-Jin Chang**, *viola* • **Victoria Chiang**, *viola*
**Amit Peled**, *violoncello* • **Alan Stepansky**, *violoncello*
**Nina DeCesare**, *double bass* • **Ira Gold**, *double bass*
**Bai-Chi Chen**, *strings pedagogy* • **Rebecca Henry**, *strings pedagogy*

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and various guest vocalists; and an album of remixes of music by Sun Ra curated by Harrington). The other two are vinyl reissues of their classic *Black Angels* and Glass recordings.

## COMMITMENT TO THE CONTEMPORARY

Not to be found on the menu is standard classical repertoire – its absence a longstanding signature. Joan Jeanrenaud, who was the group's cellist for more than two decades (1978–99), points out that during its first years the ensemble was still playing a mix of contemporary and older repertoire, but that around 1980, two years into her tenure with the group, 'We collectively decided that we should stop playing things like Mozart or Beethoven quartets, because there were a lot of ensembles that did them – and a lot better than we did. And we weren't terribly interested in it.'

Kronos shifted its focus to 20th-century classics by composers such as Debussy, Schoenberg and Bartók alongside new works written for the group. 'And then we started working even more with composers and learning new techniques so that we expanded our knowledge and our repertoire,' says Jeanrenaud. 'It was wonderful to be in Kronos at that point, when we developed a lot of the ideas of how Kronos would tour and how the organisation would be run.' She and Harrington both emphasise the indispensable role played by Janet Cowperthwaite, who was hired as the ensemble's managing director in 1981 and is now executive director.

Jeanrenaud was only 22 when she joined Kronos following a year in Geneva studying with Pierre Fournier. She'd been urged to consider playing with the ensemble by Dutt, who had been a fellow classmate at Indiana University's Bloomington music school and who became Kronos Quartet's violist in 1977. Violinist Sherba came on board in 1978, the year Jeanrenaud joined. Since that time, only the cellist has changed, with Jeanrenaud's successors being Jennifer Culp, Jeffrey Zeigler, Sunny Yang and now Wiancko, who joined earlier this year.

Concert organisers initially tried to get the ensemble to agree to include at least one classical piece on their programmes, recalls Jeanrenaud, 'But we just kept insisting we wanted to play only contemporary music. And they came to accept that – and even began commissioning more composers for us to play.' She adds: 'There was always this desire to be really interesting and provocative. We even applied that to how we dressed and used the stage and lighting to engage the audience.'

After leaving Kronos all that time ago, Jeanrenaud has been able to see more clearly the significant impact the ensemble has had on music. She later went on to focus on composing and improvising and is among those commissioned to contribute to the 50 for the Future series.

## BLACK ANGELS EPIPHANY

Not only has this intense interest in contemporary music been there from the very beginning, but also it was responsible for the birth of Kronos. A serendipitous hearing of Crumb's experimental *Black Angels: Thirteen Images from the Dark Land* inspired the 24-year-old Harrington to found Kronos in 1973, near the end of the Vietnam War era. That summer, after finishing a contract playing with the Victoria Symphony, the violinist and his wife returned from Canada to his native US. One night he chanced on *Black Angels* being played on the radio and was transfixed: 'My life was changed for ever,' he later said. 'It was scary. It was beautiful. It was wild. It had crystal glasses. It had Renaissance music. It had all kinds of instruments. It was electric.'

Crumb avoided tying his 1970 work to a specific event in that turbulent era, describing *Black Angels* as a 'threnody' for electric string quartet and percussion that represented 'a kind of parable on our troubled contemporary world'. But it struck Harrington as being exactly what he had been seeking in his quest for a genre of music that seemed meaningful in the aftermath of the horrors of the Vietnam War. 'The string quartet music ▸

Kronos Quartet performing Crumb's *Black Angels* in 1998

CATHERINE ASHMORE

I'd grown up with provided a kind of foundation and solidity, but it didn't feel like the right music for me to be playing,' Harrington told me in another conversation earlier this year.

This wasn't so much a rejection of the familiar repertoire as a recognition of new priorities. Indeed, a deep connection to Beethoven had set Harrington on his path as a professional musician. He often recounts the story of the impact of hearing a recording of the Budapest Quartet playing the opening chords of op.127 when he was a teenager: 'I can hear that sound right now, as I'm talking to you. It just entered me, and I needed to try to make that sound myself.'

Harrington recalls a few years later wanting to know more about what music sounded like beyond the epicentre of Classical Vienna. Combine that curiosity with the fact that 'quartet playing was my favourite sound in the universe' and you have the secret behind the long history of exploration that has characterised Kronos. Harrington modestly remarks that starting a quartet 'became an opportunity to fill in some of the blanks'.

It's useful to recall that the new music scene of the 1970s differed radically from what it is today. Boulez pronounced the string quartet to be 'dead' (though he later admitted he had been wrong), but for Harrington, *Black Angels* opened up the limitless potential of the medium – not only in the sense of new sounds, but also as proof that music 'can address feelings that are happening right now and can be pivotal to the way we think about life. That's what *Black Angels* gave us right away.'

## A FOCUS ON COMMISSIONING

Already with Kronos Quartet's debut concert in November 1973 in Seattle (which attracted an audience of only nine), Harrington determined to make presenting brand-new music central to their mission. He asked Ken Benshoof, who'd been his composition teacher at the University of Washington, to write something for them. A bag of doughnuts was offered as payment for the new piece, *Traveling Music*.

'I just listened to it again yesterday, and I still think it's so beautiful,' says Harrington, who's been reviewing past releases to compile five playlists (one for each of Kronos's five decades) as part of a special anniversary bonus that the ensemble's label Nonesuch began releasing monthly in September, the last appearing in January. 'What Kronos had to learn in order to play Ken's music was central to the work that we've done ever since,' he remarks. 'It allowed us to know how to work with Terry Riley later. And we've learnt so many things from Terry. Those two relationships in that first decade were absolutely critical.'

> 'IF SOMETHING IS WONDERFUL, LET'S CONTINUE AND TRY TO GO EVEN BEYOND THAT' – *DAVID HARRINGTON*

Jeanrenaud remembers the quartet first getting to know Riley at the end of its residency at Mills College in Oakland, California, whose faculty Riley had joined to teach Indian classical music. 'At that time, Terry had not written any music down for quite a while because he was focused on singing. We went up to his ranch, and David convinced Terry to write some music for us.'

Riley has written around thirty pieces for Kronos ('Each one of them has its own special look at the universe,' notes Harrington), including *Sun Rings* (2002) for quartet and chorus, the 2019 recording of which earned the group one of the three Grammys that have distinguished its prolific discography to date. One of three works commissioned by Carnegie Hall for the New York programme in November is a new version for 50 musicians of Riley's 1980 quartet *Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector*.

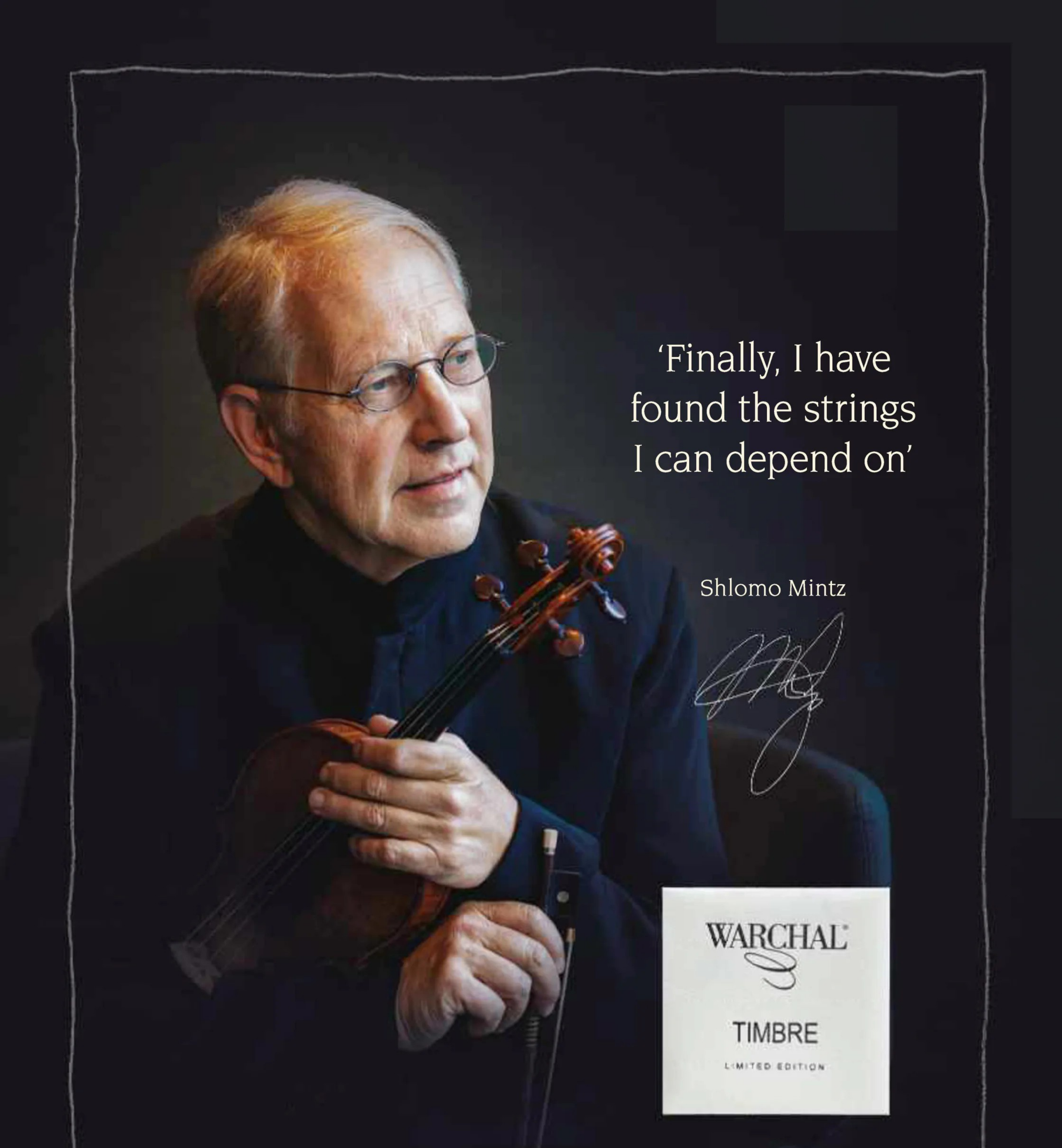
Riley epitomises the value the Kronos musicians have found in cultivating continuity and relationships with composers with whom they develop a mutual sympathy – as does Glass. (Ironically, they never succeeded in persuading Crumb to write a new work for them.) 'Working with all these composers was so great – to be involved with how this music developed over those years,' says Harrington. 'My feeling about maintaining those relationships is really simple. If something is wonderful, let's continue and try to go even beyond that. I believe it's important for people to keep challenging themselves.'

A similar phenomenon applies to performers with whom the group has repeatedly collaborated. The relationship with the pipa virtuoso Wu Man, who is part of the all-star line-up scheduled for the Carnegie Hall concert, has been especially significant and productive, beginning with the commission of the ritualistic *Ghost Opera* (1994), a landmark work for string quartet and pipa by Tan Dun. Riley's *The Cusp of Magic* (2004) is another work inspired by the collaboration between the quartet and Wu Man. ▹

Kronos performs Terry Riley's *Sun Rings* in 2002

Pipa virtuoso Wu Man (*centre*) performs *A Chinese Home* with the quartet in 2009

PHOTOS JAY BLAKESBERG

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Kronos Quartet and Terry Riley (*centre*) in 1983

## THE BEST TEACHERS

Harrington's admiration for the artists Kronos has taken to heart runs deep. He describes them as great teachers who continually draw the musicians beyond their known limits to make new discoveries. 'Ken Benshoof is a marvellous teacher, still active at the age of 90. So is Terry Riley. So is Franghiz Ali-Zadeh. When Sofia Gubaidulina wrote her Fourth Quartet [1993], she showed us how to do all the techniques to play it, including the bouncing of balls on the string. These people are cut out of the essence of humanity. They give us the best teaching.'

The process works in both directions. Composers in turn learn from their interaction with Kronos when given the challenge to write a new work. Górecki is a favourite of Harrington's. The Polish composer completed three quartets for Kronos – the last of which was to have been premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1994 but was mysteriously withheld for another decade by the composer. Each of his quartets represents a radically different approach. 'Henryk told me all about his String Quartet no.4,' says Harrington. 'We were talking about all kinds of things for the future. That's what I do with every composer. He said it was going to be a shorter piece, wild and upbeat. And then after he died, nobody could find a note of that piece. But he had it very clearly in his mind.'

In a memorial following news of Górecki's death in November 2010, Harrington wrote: 'When we rehearsed with Henryk, the experience was as close as we have ever been to witnessing the raw, impassioned core in the heart of Europe's great invention: the string quartet… Górecki represented a totally independent voice. He only listened inward.'

There is no end to these lessons – they all feed the unassuageable curiosity that has been driving Kronos across its long lifespan. During that half-century, the ensemble has commissioned more than a thousand works representing cultures, styles and philosophies of making music from all around the planet. Harrington says that a new piece can still stretch the musicians to their limits in unexpected ways, as does *Segara Gunung* ('Ocean Mountain') by the Indonesian composer and singer Peni Candra Rini, one of the ten anniversary commissions being premiered throughout the season; it will be performed at the November Carnegie Hall concert.

Candra Rini's previous collaboration with Kronos, *Maduswara* (2020), was commissioned for the 50 for the Future project, and Harrington recalls: 'It felt so natural and so beautiful when we collaborated on *Maduswara*, so we wanted to keep this relationship growing.' *Segara Gunung* is one movement from a four-movement work she is currently writing for Kronos. 'There has never been any music like Peni's for us before. We have to learn how to play using a different, non-Western tuning and to create a gamelan-like sound that can be totally fluid with rhythm and also ultra-lyrical. You run into these kinds of challenges in all music, but something about Peni's work takes us to a new place.'

Another of the new commissions that particularly impresses Harrington (and has been programmed for the Barbican and Carnegie Hall concerts alike) is by American composer Gabriella Smith for amplified string quartet and electronics. Like *Segara Gunung*, Smith's (still unnamed) work addresses climate change concerns.

Working with composers who are 'the best teachers', across generations, Harrington suggests, is the secret to Kronos's uncanny ability not just to adapt to such diverse musical languages and ways of making music but also to inhabit them.

What does he foresee as the future of the art? 'I'm feeling incredibly optimistic about the hands that hold the future of the string quartet. What's happening is that more composers, more performers, more audiences are expecting concerts to be wonderfully varied and to tell stories that can only be told through music.' ●

'I'M INCREDIBLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE HANDS THAT HOLD THE FUTURE OF THE STRING QUARTET' – *DAVID HARRINGTON*

JAMES M. BROWN

The New York violin shop of Victor Flechter, as featured in *The Violinist* magazine of 1911

Many, if not most, of the earliest bow makers working in America originally hailed from Germany. **Raphael Gold** discovers how they helped lay the foundations for the industry

# ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Tracing the arc of American bow making is a tricky business. There have been nearly as many influences in its history as bow makers, and their traditions range from the self-taught to the rich heritage of French master makers. The earliest wave of bow making in America was a group of unaffiliated German immigrants, beginning in the mid-1870s. What drew these makers to the New World? Influential violin shops run by German master craftsmen took root across America as German immigration swelled, reaching nearly three million German-born immigrants by 1890. In the late 19th century, American government raised its funds mainly from tariffs on all manner of imports, including musical instruments. A central political issue of the day, tariffs averaged a whopping 45 per cent by 1911. Some makers saw the potential in moving to America and establishing a local foothold protected by the tariffs. Dealers in America sought ways to avoid tariffs by importing the actual German bow makers themselves; while others were already in the US when they saw an opportunity to dabble in, if not focus on, bow making. Each of these makers has a unique story to tell, highlighting the complex business relationship between the musical worlds of America and Germany before World War I.

The first German bow maker in America was Carl Heinrich Ludwig Bausch, known as **Ludwig Bausch Jr**. He visited New York City in the autumn of 1859 to set up an agency, intending to sell violins and bows – importantly, bows of his own making.

His arrival excited wide interest, allowing him to sell his wares in other cities as well, including Baltimore. At this time tariffs were relatively low in America, and his motives were likely an attempt to expand business beyond Europe. Despite his fame, he only remained in America for about a year. Although his attempt at establishing a foothold was ultimately unsuccessful, he may well have been the first professional bow maker ever to work in America.

**Anton Siebenhüner** was another early bow maker in the States. Although he stayed for a very short period of time (1874–78), those years catapulted his career. Born in 1851 in Schönbach (then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) he studied with Gabriel Lemböck in Vienna, then for two years with Alois Engleder in Budapest, then Andreas Engleder in Munich and Thomas Zach in Vienna. Following brief stints with Ludwig Bausch Sr in Leipzig and Karl Grimm in Berlin, he moved to New York City in 1872 to work as a master maker in the workshop of George Gemunder – as his first employee. In 1874 the young and surprisingly experienced Siebenhüner set up his own shop at 315 Sixth Street. Two years later he won first prize at the Centennial Exhibition of Philadelphia in 1876 (the first of its kind in America), probably for both bows and instruments. Though Siebenhüner is most known as a violin maker today, Henri Poidras, in his 1928 *Dictionary of Violin Makers Old and Modern*, calls him a 'good class bow maker'. He moved to Zurich, Switzerland, in 1878, establishing a thriving shop. He died in 1922.

Anton Siebenhüner

**Henry Richard Knopf** was arguably America's first prolific bow maker. Born in Markneukirchen in 1860, he studied bow making with his father, famed bow maker Heinrich Knopf, and his uncle, Wilhem Knopf. He studied violin making with Bausch in Dresden and Christian Adam in Berlin. In 1879 he immigrated to America, to work for John Albert in Philadelphia. He first appears in the 1880 Philadelphia census, living with a couple of Russian citizens in the home of a saloon keeper. Understanding his potential, he opened his own business in New York City in the latter part of 1880, thus etching his name in posterity.

Early in his career, he worked to establish himself as a maker of bows and instruments, clearly taking advantage of the protectionist high tariffs. Several encyclopaedias estimate he made around a thousand bows. Poidras understates that H.R. Knopf was 'a talented violin and bow maker'.

Knopf was the only maker to have exhibited his bows at the first convention of the American Guild of Violinists, on 6 and 7 October 1911. The Guild was formed specifically to support and promote making in America, an early example of its kind. He exhibited a cello bow and violin bow again the following year, receiving high praise for his work. He continued to be a central element of American violin and bow making by supporting the first meeting of the American Violin Makers Association in 1924.

At the same time, he had ambitions to exploit his contacts in Europe. He was naturalised in New York City on 13 May 1887, and applied for his first passport five days later. And as long as he was in business, he kept his passport up to date, regularly making publicised trips to and from Europe where he sourced old instruments and bows. During these business trips he would have also met with contemporary makers, including Eugène Sartory, importing their work.

He was active in all aspects of the business throughout his career. Apart from making and repairs, he was an expert witness in several court cases, including one against Victor Flechter in 1890 (see page 58); he was elected one of the vice presidents of the thriving American Academy of Violin Makers in 1914.

The business had grown so much that in 1921 he was obliged to relocate to larger premises, from 127 West 42nd to 145 West 45th. That same year his two sons, Eugene and Richard, formally joined the business, forming H.R. Knopf and Sons. Eugene had shown 'great aptitude for violin making' ▹

GOLD/TORTOISESHELL BOW COURTESY BRUCE BABBITT. SILVER/EBONY BOW RICHARD WARD. OTHER PHOTOS RAPHAEL GOLD

*Above and below* H.R. Knopf was arguably the finest German-born bow maker of his time living in the United States. Always of the finest pernambuco, these bows demonstrate his elegant precision. Unsurprisingly, his bows are like that of his family's work, but with a personalised head model.

This bow demonstrates Anton Keil's ability as a maker. Of good-quality pernambuco, the head is small, almost dainty. The frog appears long, with a small Parisian eye. The bows made by Keil in New York were branded: FLECHTER NEW YORK. Apart from advertising his 'own manufacture of bows', he also ran advertisements advertising his 'own importation of bows', which were branded 'VSF'.

assisting his father in the shop; Richard, who had a degree in business, was announced as taking care of the advertising and sales management side of the business. They advertised heavily that year. By 1922 they had agents selling H.R. Knopf violins and bows in several states, including Vermont, Michigan, Ohio, and beyond. The great cellist and composer Victor Herbert owned and used a Henry Knopf cello; renowned violinist Maud Powell was also a regular customer of his. His bows and instruments were celebrated throughout America.

According to his obituary, the business was dissolved in 1931 when he retired. In December 1939 an advertisement from Wurlitzer's stated the company had 'made a timely purchase of the entire stock' of H.R. Knopf and Sons and were selling it off.

Of the plethora of respected shops in NYC, it can be argued that **John Friedrich** and Brother was the best. John apprenticed with Joseph Schonger, violin maker in Cassel. He also worked with Möckel in Berlin, Hammig of Leipzig, and shops in several other German cities including Stuttgart before immigrating to America in 1883. That same year he opened a shop with his brother William, who was already living in America. At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, John won a gold medal for 'a handsome exhibition… of a number of his violins, violas, violoncellos, *and several bows*'. By the time America entered World War I he was employing a large repair staff, was importing large quantities of bows, instruments and accessories, and was the appraiser for the United States Government. No doubt the large quantity of imported bows bearing the firm's name has overshadowed the fact that he made bows in the early years. It is probable the bows he made himself were branded with his name, rather than the shop name.

Perhaps the most mysterious German bow maker working in America only stamped his bows with the name of his employer: Victor Flechter. This mysterious *bogenmacher* was **Anton Keil**, mentioned erroneously in Wenberg and Jalovec as 'Kiel'. In Harvey Whistler's unpublished notes, compiled for his unfinished book *Bow Makers of the World*, some details emerge of this most enigmatic bow maker, but even then his full name was previously unknown. Genealogical research brings him a little more into focus.

Anton Keil was born in September 1865 in Schöneck, Saxony. It is still unknown where he learnt bow making but he likely started in Markneukirchen. He departed for New York on 17 October 1889, listing himself as '*instrumentenmacher*'. In census records he is listed as a violin maker living in Manhattan. It also appears he made a trip back to Germany before returning to NYC in 1894. He started working for Flechter on arrival in 1889, although he never received recognition by his boss for his work. His name did not appear in any advertisement and, unlike most of his peers in New York, he was apparently never mentioned in a newspaper article.

The timing of Keil's trip to America right after his 25th birthday is significant. **Victor Flechter**, born in 1849, was a native of Cincinnati where he was a respected musician and teacher. A well-connected man of 'pleasing appearance and suave manner' who spoke English, German and French, Flechter made his big move to NYC in 1888, where he encountered a saturated market of well-established violin houses. He publicised the success of his first business trip to Europe in 1889, returning with large quantities of instruments and bows for sale. It was on this business trip that he likely found Keil and hired him.

According to Whistler, Keil's bows, branded with Flechter's name, were given to such luminaries as Joseph Hollman, Maud Powell and Pablo de Sarasate. *The Strad* (October 1900) states that Flechter counted among his close friends the likes of Joachim, Wilhelmj, Marteau, Reményi and Ole Bull. Many of them surely owned a Victor Flechter bow made by Anton Keil. *The Violin Times* said Flechter presented one of his bows to Eugène Ysaÿe in 1895. A bow was presented at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition. During most of the year Keil repaired bows and instruments for Flechter, but worked 'prolifically during the slack summer months'. Keil was an unheralded artist, seemingly content to work for no glory.

It is interesting that Keil was able to make bows at all, as Flechter's time in the business was plagued by scandals. In 1890 the young violinist Maud Powell accused him of selling her a fake Duiffopruggar for $500, which was apparently purchased ▸

KEIL'S BOWS, BRANDED WITH FLECHTER'S NAME, WERE GIVEN TO SUCH LUMINARIES AS JOSEPH HOLLMAN, MAUD POWELLE AND PABLO DE SARASATE

FLECHTER BOW RICHARD WARD

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Franz Winkler advertised several models of bow, including Dodd, Bausch, Voirin, Tourte and the 'Winkler Artist grade'. This is a classic example, with the head boasting a sharp, almost hatchet style, with a unique high-cut chamfer transitioning to the stick. His Dodd models had a plain ebony frog. Prices in the 1928 Carl Fischer catalogue ranged from $20 for the Dodd model to $35 for his Tourte model. His gold and ebony frogs cost $75; $100 for gold and tortoiseshell.

**HIRING A GERMAN MAKER TO LIVE AND WORK IN AMERICA WAS A POPULAR BUSINESS MODEL AT THIS TIME**

from Henry Knopf for $40! He was also sued by an important violinist, Max Bendix, under similar circumstances. Of the multitude of shady dealings publicised in the press, one nearly landed him in Sing Sing prison in 1895. Following a multi-year legal battle where he was accused of stealing a Stradivari violin, causing the death of its owner, Flechter was finally exonerated, leaving a tarnished legacy. With such a boss, Keil kept his head down and worked silently; perhaps he was content making a living and not being publicly affiliated with such infamy.

Keil appears to have worked in NYC at least until 1910 – a rather long 21-year temporary stay, never marrying or seeking US citizenship. He reappears in Schöneck, Saxony, in 1929, as a *geigenbogenmacher* living on 18 Oelsnitzer Str, though he likely left before the outbreak of WWI, leaving behind a number of interesting, if obscure bows and many more questions.

**Franz Winkler** worked in America for only two years but developed a lasting reputation as a maker of good bows and close business relationships. Born on 20 October 1878, he studied bow making with his father Franz Heinrich Winkler in his native Markneukirchen. He worked for Karel van der Meer in Holland as a bow maker before possibly returning to Markneukirchen to set up on his own.

It was in August 1903, aged 24, that he set sail for Philadelphia to work for the dealer Julius Gütter (who trained the young William Moennig Sr). It seems that Winkler was important enough a maker that Gütter personally escorted him from Germany, along with 24-year-old Conrad Heberlein, Gütter's cousin and violin maker. According to Wenberg, Winkler made bows that were branded with Julius Gütter's name (it would likely have been spelled 'Guetter'), similar to the relationship between Victor Flechter and Anton Keil. Hiring a German maker to live and work in America was a popular business model at this time, allowing the dealer to circumvent the high rates of the 1897 Dingley Tariff Act. The idea was to manufacture good German bows in America.

Winkler stayed for a very short time before moving to Chicago to work for Robert Pelz, where his bows became quite popular with members of the Chicago Symphony. Most likely American city life was not for him, and he returned to Europe in 1905. After a brief stint in Paris, he returned to his roots in the German countryside where he later owned a restaurant and small farm. By 1928 Carl Fischer of New York was the 'sole American agent' of his bows.

Taken as a group, these German makers qualify as the first bow making wave in America. They all acted under the same historical pressures, with tariffs in America's growing economy creating an opening for the intrepid bow maker and businessman. Several of these German-born makers saw themselves in a historical role, joining upstart American 'guilds' and promoting American bow making with exhibits in various World's Fairs. Today it is easy to forget that, apart from the Englishman Edward Tubbs, the first attempts at bow making in America were done by German immigrants, who together formed a seminal role in American musical culture. ●

**FAMOUS BOW-MAKER SETTLES IN CALIFORNIA.**

Violin players will be interested to learn that a famous violin bow-maker has located in California recently. His name is Nürnberger-Süss, and his residence is in Navato, Marin County. He is a native of the well-known musical city of Markneukirchen in Germany and he is the grandson of Chr. Süss, the celebrated bow-maker, of whom he was also a pupil. There is no possible phrase of the art of bow-making that Mr. Nürnberger has not studied thoroughly and he is therefore able to meet the most complicated requirements. In Germany, Mr. Nürnberger was associated with the most prominent violin makers, and in Europe as well as America, many a Nürnberger bow is used by famous artists. This distinguished member of the rare vocation of bow-makers had no reason to be dissatisfied with his success at home. But the fact that not les than four-hundred bow- and-violin-supply makers have settled in the well known manufacturing city of Markneukirchen, impelled Mr. Nürnberger to seek a field less subject to oppressive competition, and so he decided to come to America where bow-makers are not too numerous and where there is a tariff that imposes 45% duty on imported violin-bows. Any intelligent violinist will therefore appreciate the advantage to be derived from the proximity of a man of such distinguished reputation, where a really fine violin-bow of the greatest workmanship can be secured at prices from which the import duty of 45% less the big profits of the middle man are deducted. That such enterprise as that of Mr. Nürnberger deserves the heartiest support and encouragement on the part of professional and amateur musicians should be a self-evident proposition.

San Francisco was thirsty for a professional bow maker, and this notice from the *Pacific Coast Musical Review* of 26 April 1913 clearly states that tariffs on musical equipment were part of Nürnberger-Suess's decision to move to California.

WINKLER BOW RICHARD WARD/IFSHIN VIOLINS

# THE SCHUBERTS

## The history of San Francisco's very own bow making family

William made bows which he branded 'SCHUBERT'. The chamfers are very soft, almost round. In this example, the ferrule is branded 'DRGM' and fabricated in the manner of Nürnberger-Suess, with the solder line on the top.

The Schubert family had an outsized, if unrecognised, impact on musical life in the San Francisco Bay Area. Richard Schubert, the first in the family to resettle, worked there for nearly 60 years with a stellar reputation, making and repairing. He brought over his brother Christian Wilhelm Schubert to help him in his shop; Richard was likely the exclusive agent of his more famous brother, Paul Schubert, importing his bows in large numbers; his sister, Anna, moved to California's Bay Area with her famous bow making husband, August Albin Nürnberger, known as Nürnberger-Suess. It is also possible Anna helped make frogs for some of her husband's bows.

August Richard Schubert was born into a violin and bow making family on 22 December 1872. After an apprenticeship in his native Markneukirchen, he worked for Carl Zach in Vienna and later Otto Miggs in Koblenz. When Miggs moved to London, Schubert followed; Hill & Sons found his repair work excellent, and apparently made use of his talents. He moved back to Markneukirchen around 1898 before immigrating to America in 1900 to head the newly expanded violin department of Sherman, Clay & Co. While there, he primarily did high-end repairs, but also made several violins. In 1910 he set up his own shop at 101 Post St and remained there until 1959.

Needing an extra hand with his new shop, he brought his 35-year-old brother Christian Wilhelm to San Francisco from Markneukirchen, Germany. Born in 1875, Christian probably had similar training as his older brother, though did not enjoy as wide a reputation. William, as he was known, stayed with his brother from 1910 to 1930 before retiring. He died in 1936.

While Richard advertised as a violin and bow maker, receiving accolades from the likes of Yehudi Menuhin, Fritz Kreisler, Eugène Ysaÿe and Jan Kubelík, it is clear that Willi made and repaired the bows, stamping at least one which was presented to Ysaÿe on a well-publicised concert tour to the Bay Area in 1913.

While local oral tradition has it that Paul Schubert lived in San Francisco (it is also printed in Wenberg), the historical record does not support this claim. We know Paul worked with Nürnberger-Suess in Germany until the latter moved to America in 1912; he also appears in the directories and World Book in 1925, 1929, and 1937 on, in Adorf, near Markneukirchen. I have never seen his name as violin or bow maker in any directory in San Francisco, he is not in any immigration record or census, there is no mention of his name in any newspaper article, and he had no advertisement in any contemporary Bay Area periodical. If Paul, whose bows were sold in large quantities in the Bay Area, were in San Francisco working with his brother, he would have made his presence known, and there is simply no trace of him in the historical record.

Nürnberger-Suess, on the other hand, arrived in San Francisco with fanfare (see 'Bows on the Bay', November 2021). The economy in San Francisco was healthy and growing at a fast pace, and had a thriving music scene, with theatre orchestras and vaudeville orchestras of all kinds, including the newly formed San Francisco Symphony. Musicians were thirsty for a professional bow maker. Obviously an adventurous spirit, Nürnberger-Suess was willing to try a life in what was then a far-flung part of the world. The family moved an hour north to rural Novato shortly after arriving, Richard Schubert loaning the money for the property. Apart from his bow making, Nürnberger-Suess was also a farmer, having a contract with the Almond Board of California. He not only sold his bows locally but he also advertised nationally in The Violinist during the 1920s, and even tried teaching the next generation of California bow makers in Alfred Lanini.

SCHUBERT BOW RICHARD WARD/COURTESY LOVELAND VIOLINS. NÜRNBERGER-SUESS BOW ALEX DUMITRACHE/COURTESY LOVELAND VIOLINS

Nürnberger-Suess was the only professionally trained bow maker in the west of the US for decades. This bow was made for Alfred Lanini, a bow making student of his, and a respected violin maker. Nürnberger-Suess frequently used pins for the metal slide as decorative dots on the frog or button.

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# CHARLES FRANCIS ALBERT

BY BRUCE BRAUN BABBITT

Even though this article features the work of Charles Francis Albert, it is worth saying a few words about his father. John Albert, like many who came before and after, was a Saxon transplant to America and a product of 19th-century. He brought his family to Philadelphia looking for freedom and prosperity. Because of his scientific/industrial approach to problem solving, he found great success culminating in the American Star Violin Factory.

On this solid foundation in the New World, and his inherited love of the violin, Charles Albert had the opportunity to find his own bearings. Not unlike others in this field (the Wurlitzers come to mind), the next generation took to the artistic side of things. After working with his father for eleven years, Charles set out on his own in 1865. Before his career and life drew to a close in 1901, he became one of the most esteemed violin makers and restorers of his time. His son Charles Francis Albert Jr (1869-1915) then took over the business.

It is worth noting that, between the success of father and son, the logical course of events would require more skilled workers to follow from Saxony. Those that then came to Philadelphia were most notably Henry R. Knopf and Charles A. Voigt.

MAKER
CHARLES FRANCIS ALBERT

NATIONALITY
AMERICAN

BORN
1842

DIED
1901

INSTRUMENT
VIOLIN

DATE
1889

## MATERIALS

This 1889 violin has a one-piece spruce top, showing a very even and consistent spacing of the grain. The back, also of one piece, is exceptional. It shows the maple flame quite prominently, almost like waves in water, ascending ever so slightly from left to right.

## F-HOLES

These stand fairly straight and long. The lower eyes were probably cut with a circle cutter. The top wings are shaped in such a way to give the upper eyes a slightly oval appearance. The lower wings have a delicate slight fluting. There are well-marked notches midway along the sides of the holes in the traditional manner.

## SCROLL

The wood of the neck and scroll appears to match that of the ribs and back. The head is well carved, with bevelled edges to the volute and both sides of the pegbox. The varnish finishing of the entire head and pegbox work harmoniously with the rest of the instrument, even matching the lower wings of the f's.

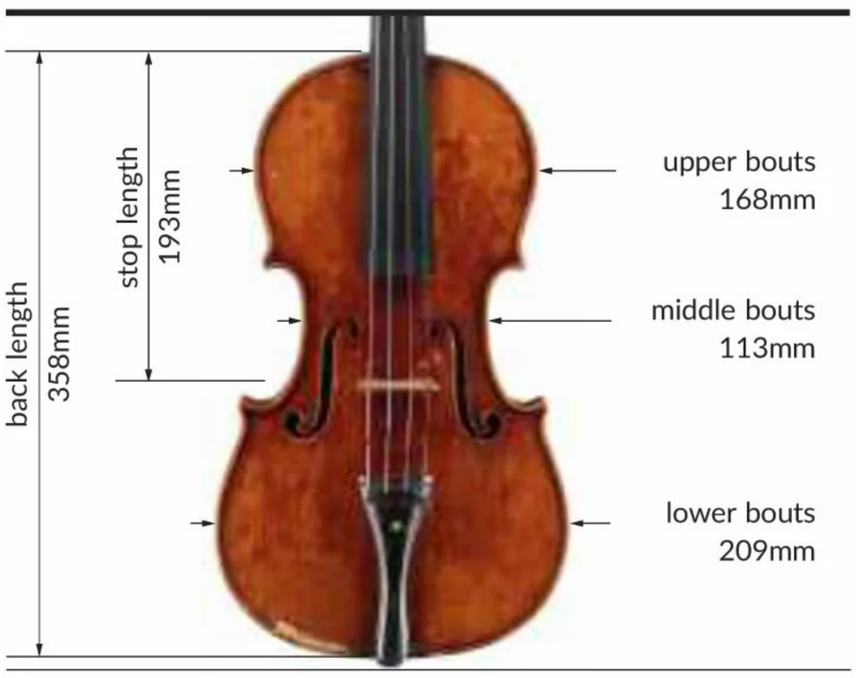
## VARNISH

The maker has chosen to shade the violin intentionally, and imitate some slight signs of wear. The imitation technique is most telling in the middle of the back, and the resting area behind the scroll. The varnish is a beautiful rich dark red–orange over a dark amber ground.

## LABEL

The prominent label is adorned with ten images of medals (some showing front and back), with small printing of places and dates. There is an elaborate winged logo to the right, and a musical harpist made into the letter C, which frame his name 'Charles F. Albert'. Below it reads 'Philadelphia', and below that 'Fecit Anno 1889', with the 89 written in ink. ▹

ALL PHOTOS NATHAN TOLZMANN




All measurements taken with a tape measure

# Establishing a consistent double bass neck heel

A personal method that can be utilised during the design of the neck and scroll

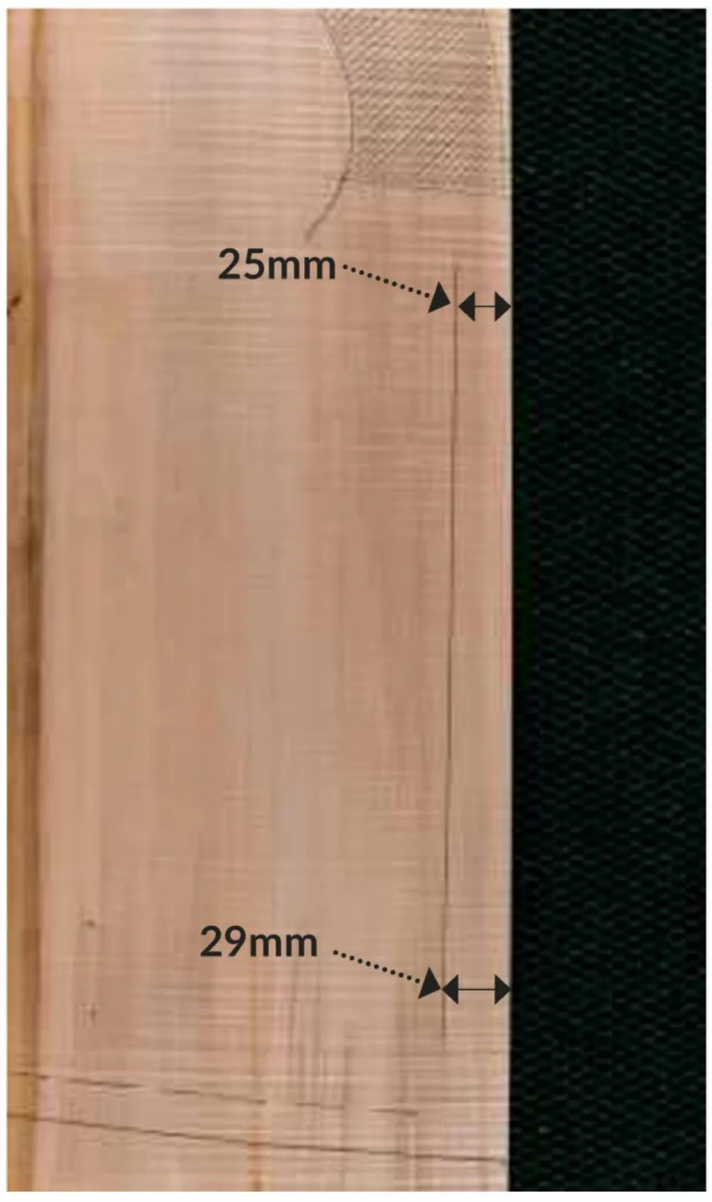
**BY NICK LLOYD**

Double bass maker based in Nicholas County, KY, US

One of the great rewards of being a double bass maker is the seemingly endless variety of bass models, sizes, outlines, f-holes, arching styles and string lengths. The other side of the coin is that some basses are extremely uncomfortable to play, either because of their bulky neck, or because the neck lacks a desired 'D' stop in the heel. I have built basses with a string length as short as 39 inches (990.6mm) and as long as 41.75 inches (1060.5mm). But all have had a comfortable neck.

In this article I'd like to share a simple process that yields a consistent bass neck heel, and one that can be executed in the pencil-layout phase of the neck/scroll design. This process can be used both in restoration and new making, and with any string length that your client requires.

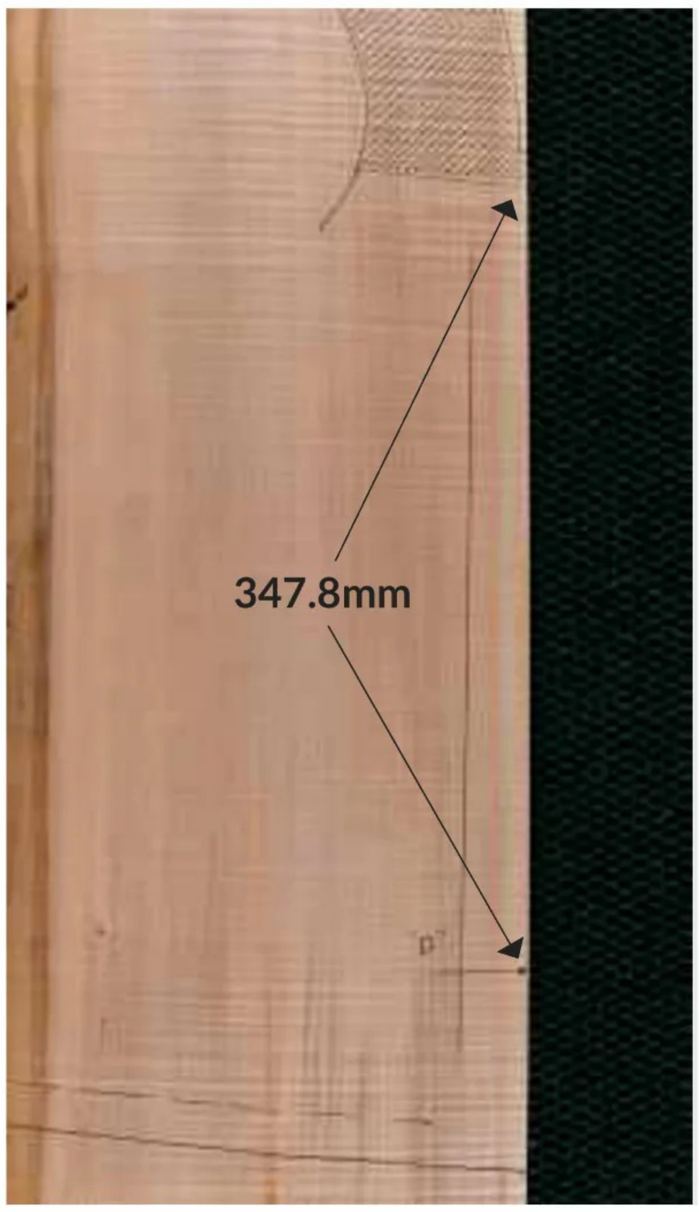
The tools needed for this process are a long ruler and a circle of scrap wood shaped to a diameter of 1.75 inches (44.5mm). In these photos I'm using a squared maple block with my scroll outline already traced.




**Working out the neck line**

1 Overall bass neck thicknesses have a variety of solutions and measurements. During this layout phase I use 25mm of maple for first position and 29mm for third position. This is my neck line. After the ebony fingerboard is glued on, and everything has been finished and sanded, my final neck thickness measurements are: 42mm measured at point 'E' on the D string in first position; and 46mm measured at 'A' on the D string in third position.

The dotted line in the picture is the top edge of the bass rib where it meets the neck, and the solid line is the bottom of the maple neck foot. I like to use a mortise depth of 19mm on new double bass construction.




**Finding the note 'D'**

2 For the sake of simplicity let's assume your client requires a string length of 41.5 inches (1,054mm). The next step is to find the note 'D' on the G string: 1054mm x 0.33 = 347.8mm. This is measured from the nut, and marked as point 'D' in the picture.

**The top of the heel line ('H') is found**

3 The next step is to establish what I call the 'heel line'. For this, we first need to find point 'H' in the photo. The location of point H is 17mm 'sharp' of point D. I've found that this 17mm gap is a very comfortable distance for the bassist's left thumb to sit in the crook of the neck, allowing the first finger to locate the note D cleanly and play it in tune.

**Finding the button height**

4 The opposite end of the heel line is determined by the button height. There are several different button heights for double basses, so I will leave this number up to your specific project. For new three-quarter-size basses I personally use 32mm. But I've seen buttons as low as 20mm and of course taller than 30mm. Whatever you choose, connect the button height point to point H. This is now the top of the finished heel line. ▹

ALL PHOTOS NICK LLOYD

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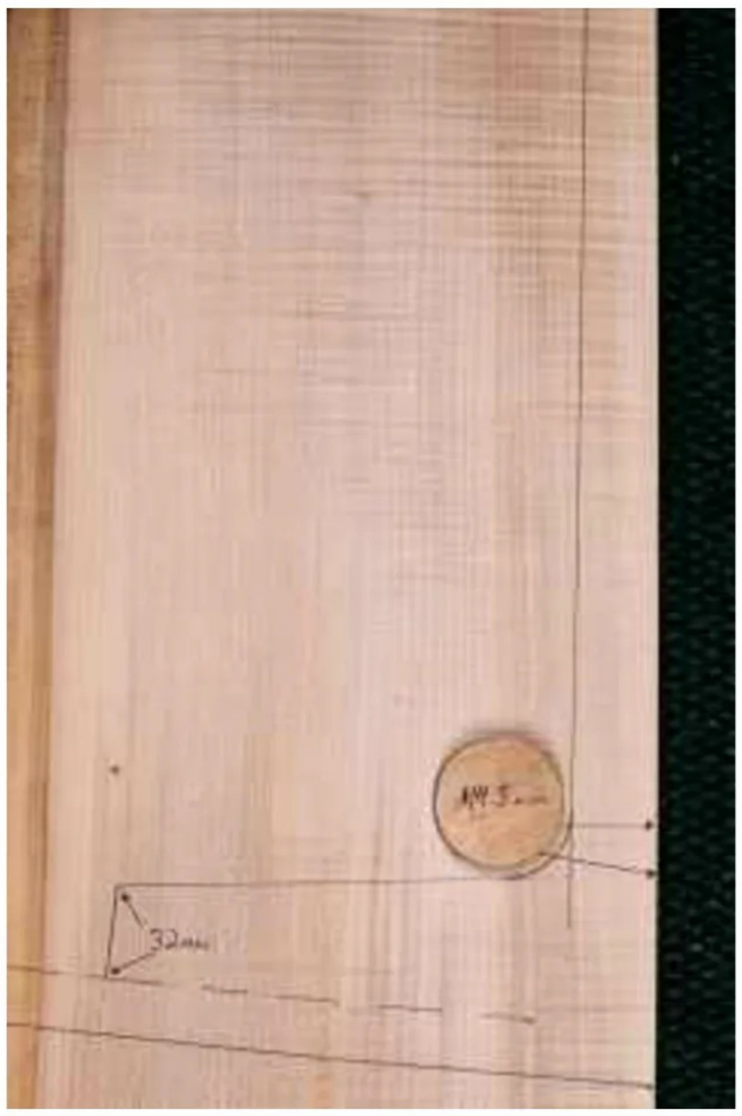


The curve from heel to neck is added

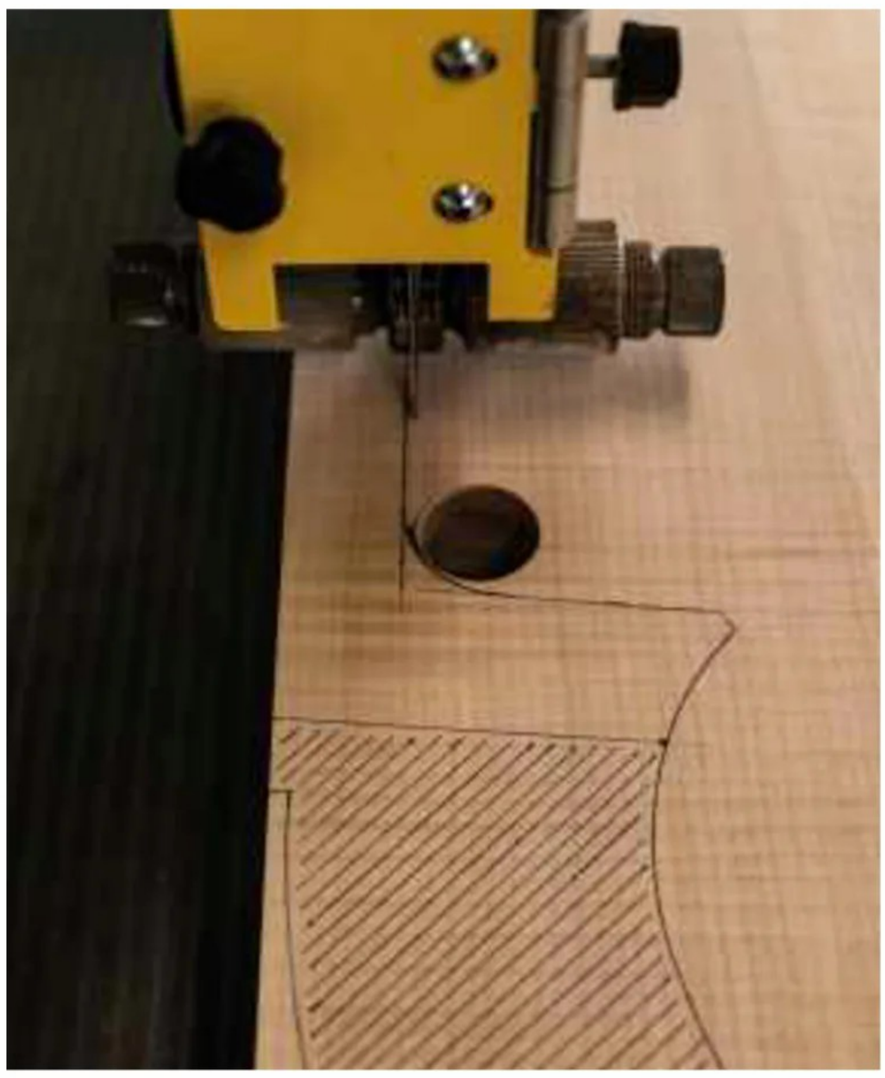
5 Next, I trace the desired curve at the intersection of the heel line and the neck line. Using a circle of 44.5mm diameter, I trace a quarter-turn on to the maple neck.

A curve of similar radius is used at the top

6 At the opposite end of the neck, I like the heel of the scroll to be 32mm away from the underside of the pegbox wall. This number, of course, will vary from bass to bass. Using the same 44.5mm-diameter circle I trace another quarter-turn on the maple neck.

Drilling a hole for the bandsaw

7 Finally I drill a relief hole to allow the bandsaw blade enough room during cutting. I use a one-inch Forstner drill bit for this step.



The neck is ready to be cut out

8 The block of waste wood can become the 'ears' of a scroll volute, if it is ever needed in the construction of a future double bass.

LUTHIER

## MICHAEL DARNTON

LOCATION

Chicago, IL, US

There's been a running theme to the workshops I've been involved with, in that the building they're in always seems to be torn down! In the 1990s the shop where I was got pulled down in order to expand the Chicago Symphony Center next door. Then I moved to a place opposite where I am now, where my current business partner Stefan Hersh also had a shop. We then started our current business and after going through two more premises, we're now on the 14th floor of a large tower block and we love the spectacular views of the city on all sides.

We own about a third of the floor we're on, and the workshop in the photo is around 50 sq m. We also have multiple practice rooms, two offices, a kitchen, a library and a vault where we keep the valuable instruments. Ironically, I actually prefer smaller spaces in which to work; I like to have all the tools I need at close hand, and not need to move from my bench too much. During Covid, like many luthiers, I started making violins at home and set up a workshop in a cedar closet, just four feet by five. It might be the smallest workshop in the world but it's perfect for me! Nowadays I usually make new instruments at home, and focus mainly on set-ups and minor repair work while I'm here.

My colleague Heide Li concentrates on more substantial repairs. I used to teach a violin making class and she came along to it for years, even though I thought her work was very accomplished from the start. Eventually I hired her and she's been with us for almost six years. She has the bench closest to mine, looking out on to the Chicago skyline, and she's just completing a restoration.

We sometimes bring apprentices into the workshop, and occasionally we have someone in from a different shop who needs to learn something like how to cut a bridge properly. ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

My great-uncle had a wagon-making factory in Toledo, OH, in the 1890s. I still have some of his tools, which are still in perfect working order. This is one of his block planes, and I also have an English-made gouge from the 1880s, which has never needed sharpening.

My workbench is the one at the far end, and when this door is open I can see the whole way down the corridor where the practice rooms are. If someone has a problem with their instrument, they can just come out and wave me over.

ALL PHOTOS STEFAN HERSH

I made this violino piccolo for my business partner Stefan. His orchestra was playing Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, which has passages that are much easier to play on this instrument than a violin. It's never been played since.

*Right* Now one of our practice rooms, this used to be where we'd stage concerts from time to time. We now operate Guarneri Hall, a custom-built 60-seat venue nearby, which is perfect for chamber music recitals.

This small cabinet is filled from top to bottom with clamps. It's set on castors, which means anyone can wheel it to their bench and keep working, rather than carry bunches of clamps back and forth.

Our bow maker Jim Min has this corner for his work. We worked together at William Harris Lee in the 1980s and when I contacted him asking if he'd like to work with us, he couldn't believe he was so memorable!

# Perfect partners

While the violin form is pretty much standardised, violas exist in all kinds of sizes and patterns. **Chris Sandvoss** offers some pointers to find the instrument most suited to the player

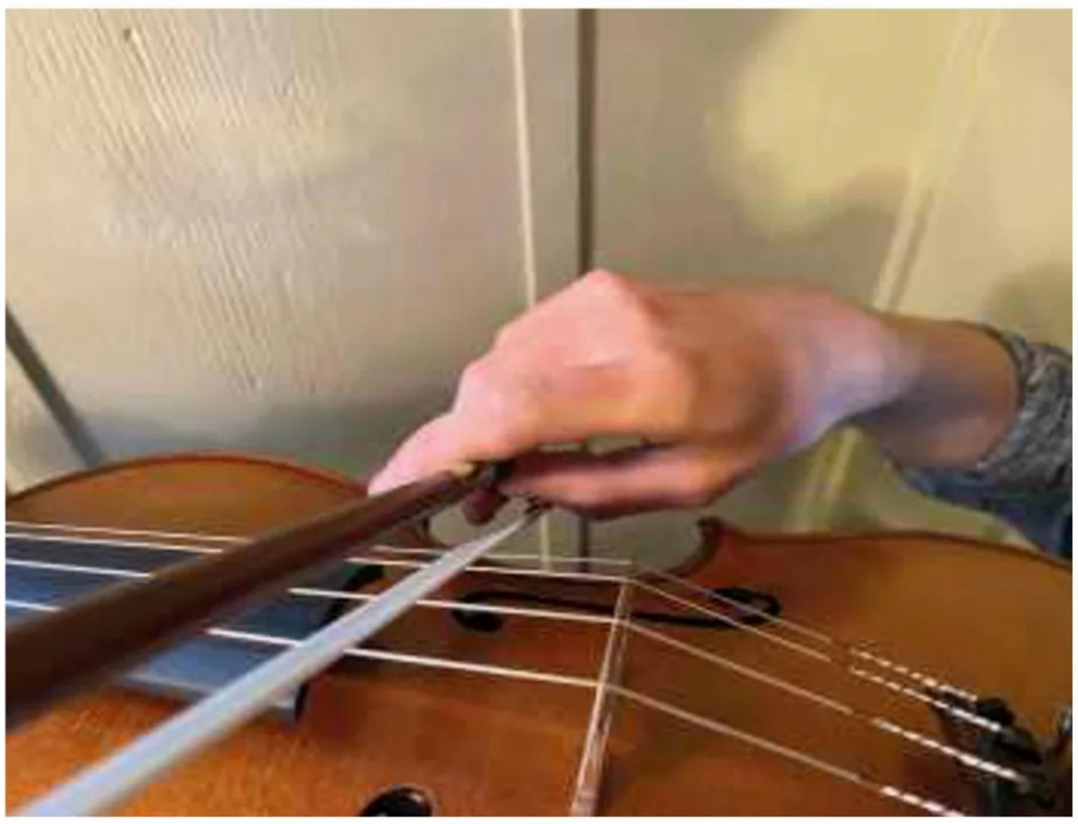


**FIGURE 1a** Bow hand clearance on a wide Cremonese model with a fingerboard cant raised on the A string

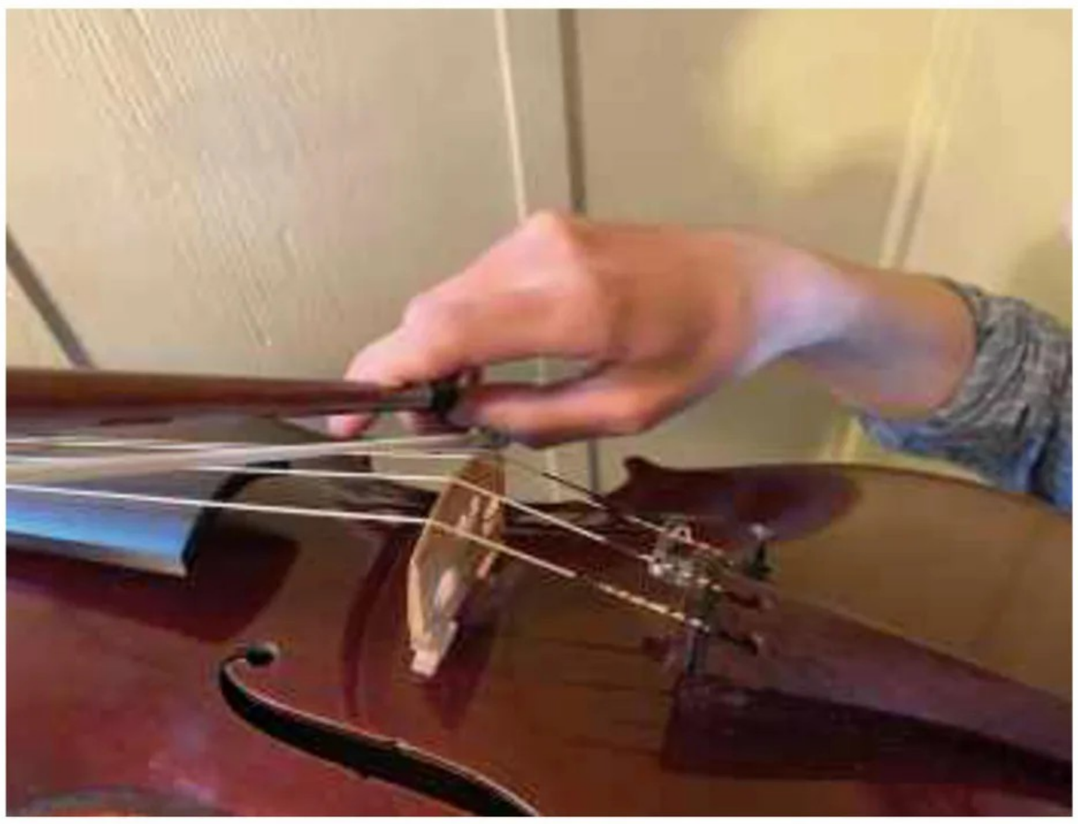


**FIGURE 1b** Narrow Brescian model with a lowered A-string cant

*The Strad*'s September 2021 issue contained an article by William Castle ('Size does matter') on finding the perfect-sized viola for a player. It drew attention, in a very thorough manner, to the delicacies of variations and their effect on playability from an ergonomic and tonal standpoint. Inspired by this, I would now like to share a few thoughts on the relationship of body outline, arching height and rib depth in viola design, as the variances therein are exaggerated throughout the wide range of models and sizes.

To add to the sizing considerations outlined in the earlier piece, I believe one should include the variance of a model's width in relation to the arching height, necessitated by the need to clear the C-bouts. Wide-modelled violas suffer from bow clearance issues if the arching and/or neck projection is too low. An added potential obstacle to playability, regardless of width, comes in the form of long, elegant Cremonese corners. In a wider viola, problems arise when a player's bow hold is required to clear the long corners when playing the A string. High-wristed bow holds are still within the pedagogical spectrum, but when a player who doesn't have one is required to clear a corner, few options remain but to adjust for one string by raising the wrist. For some, the adjustment is second nature, but to others it can be an irritant.

One way to circumvent this issue during the making process is to raise either the instrument's arching height or neck projection. But both of these can lead to a host of other issues, namely a raised bow arm and resulting potential shoulder strain.

To alleviate shoulder strain in the bow arm, it's common for luthiers to make the slope on the fingerboard more pronounced on the treble side. But this can exacerbate the corner clearance issue. Raising the treble side of the bridge through fingerboard design (making the treble side thicker) is contrary to present convention, but it does help with the clearance issue. With this method, neither the arching height nor the neck projection needs to be exaggerated for a

SMALLER VIOLAS ARE THE FUTURE, AS THE OPTIONS ARE OPEN TO A LARGER POPULATION BASE

**FIGURE 2a** High bow arm on a wide Cremonese model with raised A-string cant

**FIGURE 2b** Low bow arm: narrow Brescian model with lowered A-string cant

wide-waisted model's corner clearance. This helps the bow hold, but doesn't necessarily allow for a lowered bow arm and also forces the left side to reach further for the C string. However, shoulder rest adjustments can be made to slant the viola more, to help both lower the bow arm and reduce the left-hand reach. From a tonal standpoint, a more focused sound can come from a higher treble string, but a little forethought for graduations and arching can result in a more balanced colour palette across the strings.

In addition, rib depth should be a consideration when thinking of easing shoulder strain. Reducing this can bring the strings lower in relation to a player's body posture, making for a more comfortable playing experience. The increased space between the violist's chin and shoulder can be filled with a taller chin rest, rather than raising the shoulder rest, to help keep both shoulders relaxed while playing, reducing physical strain on both sides of the body and promoting longevity in the practice room.

As a musician I give my students the basic advice: make sure the left hand can achieve its objective of playing the fourth finger comfortably on the C string in the higher positions. As violists tend to choose instruments that are generally too large for them, the sheer weight of extended playing time causes the scroll to drop, which makes it challenging for the left elbow to extend in front of the body and achieve any comfort at all in these positions. In situating the viola higher up on the shoulder, and utilising the scroll-to-nose level to allow the left elbow to reach further in front of the body, a potential change in chin rest design and/or location might be required to allow for a comfortable head position. But the result is a better chance at playing challenging repertoire as far as left-hand freedom is concerned. With regard to the bow arm, though, the raised instrument will force it to work harder in reaching the lower string and thus might require either a very shallow or canted shoulder rest (perhaps also with padding), or none at all. The variables are many, and unique to each scenario, but if a player is blessed with large hands and fingers the project is greatly simplified, as there will be little adjustment needed to achieve left-hand comfort. It also negates the adjustment process stated above.

As a luthier I am constantly trying to better the tonal characteristics of small violas, as the ergonomics look after themselves. So many players nowadays choose the viola not because of the size of their hands, but because they love the glorious viola sound. So smaller instruments are the future as the options are open to a larger population base. For me, the 395–412mm viola is the perfect balance in size/tone ratio, 412mm being considered large. I also try to keep the rib depth shallow (34–36mm) to allow for a lowered right shoulder. In order not to lose the desired richness in tone in small violas, the arching and graduations need to reflect the needs of the lower frequencies. By thinking of the viola body as groups of coupled springs as well as a drum, the tonal needs can be met if the individual characteristics of the chosen tonewood are well understood. Also, choosing a decent viola arching height that falls within acceptable parameters can be mathematically achieved by borrowing from the violin's approximate 15:355 arch-to-body ratio. However, care must be taken to ensure that excessive body widths, with their inherent issues stated above, don't undermine the ergonomic benefits of the shorter instruments.

Perhaps the best way to avoid the entire issue is to build instruments with narrower bodies and smaller corners, allowing for a variety of arching heights and neck projections that aren't restricted in their wider counterparts. This allows for more freedom to achieve the sometimes elusive and challenging tonal/ergonomic balance while creating beautiful violas.

ALL PHOTOS CHRIS SANDVOSS

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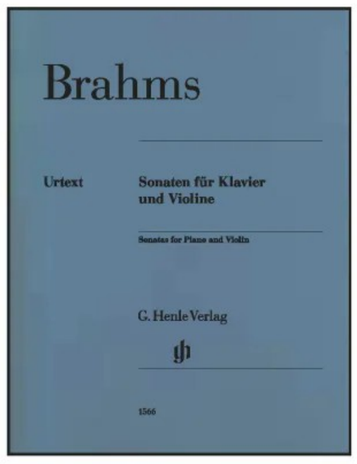


Brahms Scherzo in C minor, WoO posth.2. Urtext Edition, paperbound with marked and unmarked string parts. Ed. Michael Struck. Pf fingering Martin Helmchen. Vln fingering & bowing Frank Peter Zimmermann. Order no. HN 1566. ISMN 979-0-2018-1566-4. Printed with permission of G. Henle Verlag, München © 2022

The genesis of this work is a well-known story. In Düsseldorf in 1853, Robert Schumann enlisted the help of two up-and-coming composers, Albert Dietrich and Johannes Brahms, to write a sonata for his friend, the great violinist Joseph Joachim. It was to be presented to him after a concert on his return to the city as a surprise gift. All four movements (by the three composers) are linked using the initials of Joachim's motto, 'Frei Aber Einsam', as a musical motif, and on the first play-through it was up to Joachim to discern who had written which movement.

## Rhetoric and repetition

For the violinist the most important thing at the beginning is to set the tempo effectively, and the responsibility is all yours. You must start with energy and then be restrained because your duo partner has a lot of notes to play! It's important to make the quavers (♪) in bars 1 and 2 precise and give them the right kind of lifted articulation, so I start an up bow from the string and stay quite close. This helps prepare the main theme in the piano and gives direction to its held notes. Clearly articulating the quaver figure also means it contrasts with the wave patterns in bars 3 to 6 and this brings out the rhetoric, which in my opinion is an integral part of German music.

The beginning is marked forte and, as always with dynamics, we ask ourselves, 'Where do we have to go from here?' In this context, forte means we need to make a clear, well-articulated sound, allowing for the terraced change up to fortissimo in bar 10 and after that, the build-up from bar 19 right to the first-time bar. If we start too loud, we risk destroying that line. Just as with the spoken word, repeated figures can be used to build intensity and dynamics, such as the marked crescendo on the third and fourth repetitions in bars 5 and 6.

TOMMASO TUZJ

**THE SOLOIST**

**NAME**
JOHANNES FLEISCHMANN

**NATIONALITY**
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**STUDIED WITH**
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'Brahms uses the F-A-E motif in an entirely new, more optimistic, way and then goes further, with the restatement in a brighter key and at a higher pitch'

Fleischmann conceived *Solitaire*, an album of little-known gems by well-known composers, during the pandemic. Released in September 2023, it was recorded with Dolby ATMOS for an immersive auditory experience

## Sunbursts

After the passionate searching of the first section, it's as if the sun bursts out at bar 28. It feels like an arrival: a moment of pure joy. And we have a new theme which closely resembles the first subject of the movement by Albert Dietrich and is in fact the closest we come to hearing the 'F-A-E' motif in this movement. While Dietrich's theme is true to the minor 6th and semitone intervals implied by the three initials, Brahms broadens it out to a major 6th and whole tone which changes the tonality from minor to major. So he uses the motif in an entirely new, more optimistic, way and then goes further, with the restatement in bar 39 in a brighter key and at a higher pitch. Both statements are marked fortissimo but the restatement at bar 39 is so winning in character that, again, it's helpful to have kept some dynamic power in reserve for this phrase. In terms of tempo, you want to communicate the eagerness without rushing through it. It is somehow possible to adjust the tempo to reveal beautiful moments, and if you calm the speed during a phrase it will actually help to communicate the music.

## A binding theme

By bar 48 it is as if the clouds have covered the sun and we are back in the darker character. Brahms quotes Dietrich's theme more closely this time, with semitones and minor harmony but he develops it by writing a chromatic uplift in bar 52 after the first three notes, and an even greater uplift in bar 58 near the beginning of the second phrase. This aspect makes it sound more positive than Dietrich's theme but then each phrase ends with descending chromatic figures, which are usually associated with pain in Brahms's music. I like to think of these new highs and lows (that is, Dietrich's theme) as like season two of a much-loved TV series.

## Urgent but changing narrative

At bar 72 the main theme returns in the piano only, and apart from that, is very similar to how it appears at the beginning, except that the crescendo starting in bar 75 only reaches forte, and at bar 81 we have C naturals rather than the C flats at the equivalent place in bar 12. It feels less dramatic and as though we are being led towards something brighter. Just as in the first section, the build-up here needs to be sustained right up until the triplet hemiolas in bar 92.

The driving quaver pattern returns in bar 94, seemingly to propel the music right to the end, except this time Brahms uses a distinctive rhythm in the last two bars, which always reminds me of a slowing heartbeat. This brings us into an entirely new world at the Più Moderato.

## Expressive choices

The Trio section is pure passion and it is our job as performers to find the best ways of expressing it. I vary the options according to the hall and my mood, always mindful of the style of fingering and portamento Brahms might have expected to hear. Late recordings by artists known to Brahms can offer clues here, especially the violinist Marie Soldat. Brahms admired her performance of his Violin Concerto, saying, 'She plays it better than ten men,' and hearing her portamento-rich recordings gives us licence to connect the notes with liberal use of vibrato and portamento.

Speech-like portato throughout the first section lends itself to the expressive character and although the mood alters slightly in bar 113 when the piano reintroduces the triplet figure, there is more storytelling. The piano imitates the violin in this dreamy passage, and then with a magical cadential twist worthy of Hollywood, and often marked by an arpeggiated chord on bar 122, it is the piano's turn to narrate. Underlining this in the violin part, we have the motif from Dietrich's movement, which Brahms extends the third and fourth time from bar 126, just as the piano is reaching the peak of its phrase. I like to use more bow here than is marked, to allow the piano space to grow, and it is also important to maintain tension by playing into the rest at bar 131, so that the phrase reaches its climax in the piano in bar 132.

## Contrast and technical demands

With its last two triplet quavers in bar 135, the piano invites the reprise and it's a moment that has to be carefully managed to capture the playful back-and-forth between the instruments. From a soft legato on the A or E string we must get into a position to make an effective *pianissimo* attack on the G string, playing with a concentrated stroke, absolutely in tempo.

Nowhere in the movement is it more important to have a clear idea of the overall arc than in the coda, from bar 231. The violin part may look easy but in fact it is a challenge to produce sempre fortissimo dynamics on the A string and D string. You have to produce some of your biggest playing in these two lines and express generosity right to the end.

We want to transmit all our power into the instrument and the open G string will sustain that, but the stopped middle strings won't. Use the full weight of the arm on the open G, taking the weight out at the change of strings before leaning in on the open E. Even playing fortissimo it's necessary to be very sensitive with the right hand. Use your fingers to 'read' the difference between the strings according to whether they are open or stopped, and higher or lower tension. It's not only about weight, power and strength, but also being sensitive with how you manage that.

## Creativity unleashed

We tend to put the great composers of the past on a pedestal and it's easy to forget that they had the same issues as we do today. They had to promote themselves and they also did things purely for fun, like this sonata. It wasn't meant to be published or to make money; it was a present for their friend. But from that came enormous creativity and it ended up being a very generous gift, not just for Joachim but for the generations after him. It is a tremendous example of what can happen when artists are given the space to breathe and come together to do something, not because they have to but because they want to. ▹

INTERVIEW BY HELENA RUINARD

# Allegro

*F. A. E. In Erwartung der Ankunft des verehrten und geliebten Freundes Joseph Joachim*

**Violine**

**Komponiert 1853 · Erschienen 1906**

**WoO posth. 2**

Allegro

*f*

*cresc.*

*ff*

*ff*

*ff*

*dim.*

*f*

*ff*

*dim.*

*p*

motif

*ff*

*dim.*

*) Zum Rhythmus siehe *Bemerkungen*.

*) See *Comments* regarding the rhythm.

*) Concernant le rythme, voir *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments*.

*) Siehe *Bemerkungen*. *) See *Comments*. *) Voir *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments*.

## Trio

### Più Moderato

99

*f espressivo*

108

*f* *dim.* *p*

117

*sostenuto* *p* *p*

127

*f* *dim. e rit.*

136

*in tempo*
*pp ma marc.*
*poco a poco cresc.*

142

*ff*

149

*ff*

156

163

*ff* *dim.*

169

*p* *ff*

*) Siehe *Bemerkungen*. *) See *Comments*. *) Voir *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments*.

175 *dim.* *p*

181 *p*

188 4 4

195 *p poco a poco dim.* 4 4 4

202 *poco rit.**) [*a tempo*] *pp* 3 *cresc.*

211 3 *f* *sempre cresc.*

217 *ff* *ff*

224 3 3 3 Coda 3

234 spread *sempre ff e grandioso*

244 tr tr tr tr tr tr A

*) Siehe *Bemerkungen*. *) See *Comments*. *) Voir *Bemerkungen* ou *Comments*.

TECHNIQUE

# Playing it smart

## Starting to explore sound options with the bow

**ALEXANDER BAILLIE**

Solo cellist and teacher; professor of cello at the Hochschule für Musik Bremen, Germany

BORN
Stockport, UK

STUDIED WITH
Joan Dickson, Anna Shuttleworth, André Navarra, Jacqueline du Pré

TEACHES
All ages
(Germany and UK)

Essentially any exploration of sound production on the cello relies on three elements – the placement of the bow on the string, the speed of the bow, and the amount of weight or pressure applied. By focusing on any one or any combination of these, it is possible to simplify what is going on with tone production and to solve any problem relating to it. Thinking of the points of contact between the fingerboard and the bridge as the five lanes of a motorway is a formula that takes the mystery out of playing, and is a reliable image to turn to again and again.

Many students haven't explored the full range of possibilities available to them on their instruments, even though the cello is a piece of precision equipment. They tend to be especially reluctant to play near the bridge, the place where the cello sounds at its best because of the very short string length vibrating there. This means that they are neglecting the best sound the instrument will make and are not pushing it to its maximum potential; much as racehorses like to run, cellos react well when pushed to extremes.

## FIRST EXERCISES

Check that your thumb isn't tight; it should be soft and malleable, and opposing your second and third fingers on the stick. Experiment with the five lanes, or contact points, observing inwardly how each one feels in your bowing hand:

- Lane 5 is to be found using a flautando bow stroke on the fingerboard. This can make a magic (and somewhat sketchy) sound. You will find it necessary to play with a fast, light bow stroke.
- Lane 4 has a slightly thicker sound (many people play here successfully although we often need a richer core to the sound, so too much use of this lane will inevitably pall)
- Lane 3 has a thicker and deeper character because more overtones are being generated, meaning that more 'information' is discernible by the listener
- Lane 2 engages and will express the true and individual character of your cello
- Lane 1 is pretty much on the bridge and is the slow lane. This gives many options: growly, grainy, intense, deep, basso profondo.

Now, using a whole bow for each note (it is important to stick to this parameter throughout), play four of each specified note value on an open string at ♩= 60

- Lane 5: Play four quavers (♪)
- Lane 4: Play four crotchets (♩)
- Lane 3: Play four minims (𝅗𝅥)
- Lane 2: Play four semibreves (𝅝)
- Lane 1: Play four breves (𝅜)

As you move closer to the bridge, the challenge is to sustain the bow with an even stroke, looking after the sound carefully without letting it break or tremble. Repeat the exercise on each open string.

ALEX YANDELL

## CHANGING LANES

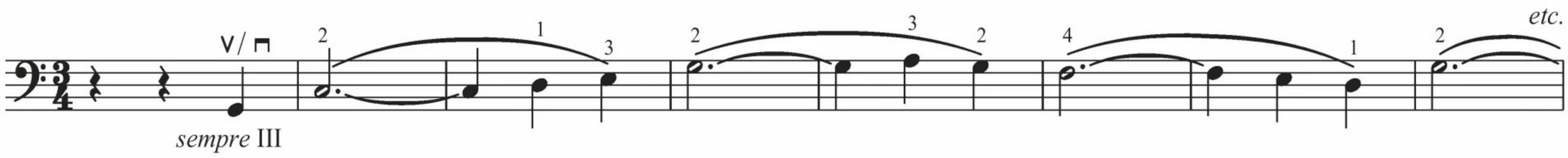
To practise changing the contact-point lane, manipulate your fingers softly on the bow to guide it to the new lane:

- Up to down bow (lead with the first finger). At the heel, pull your right-hand fourth finger towards you; the point of the bow will follow. Its angle will be such that you will automatically change lane by moving off on a new down bow.

## STUDIES AND REPERTOIRE

A favourite daily go-to 'study' for students practising sound production is the simple yet beautiful tune from Franz Lehár's *Gold and Silver* (**example 1**), originally for orchestra, and the beginning shown as I teach it, for solo cello.

**EXAMPLE 1** Tune from Franz Lehár's *Gold and Silver*



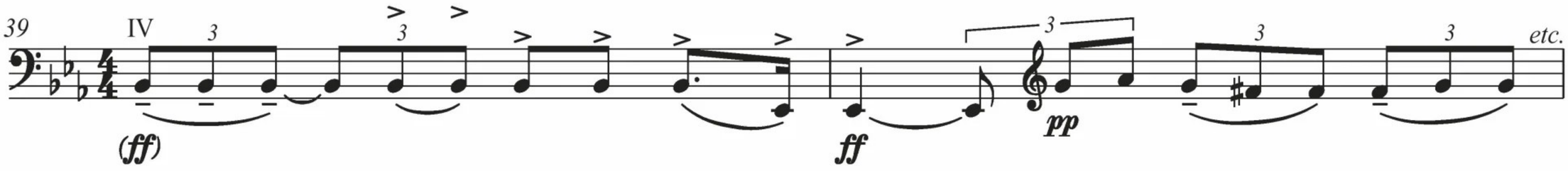

Play it three times, once each on the G, D and A strings with full bows. This tune demands that the various lanes of the bow are used and is simple enough for students to monitor the way they use their bows. Slur two bars to a bow as shown, starting at the heel with an up-beat up bow or at the point with an up-beat down bow, propelling the sound and listening to the resonance so that the intensity of the sound isn't lost at the end of the ties. As a fun extension that explores different sound worlds, ask students to play this tune in the style of another composer (Haydn, Brahms or Fauré, for example).

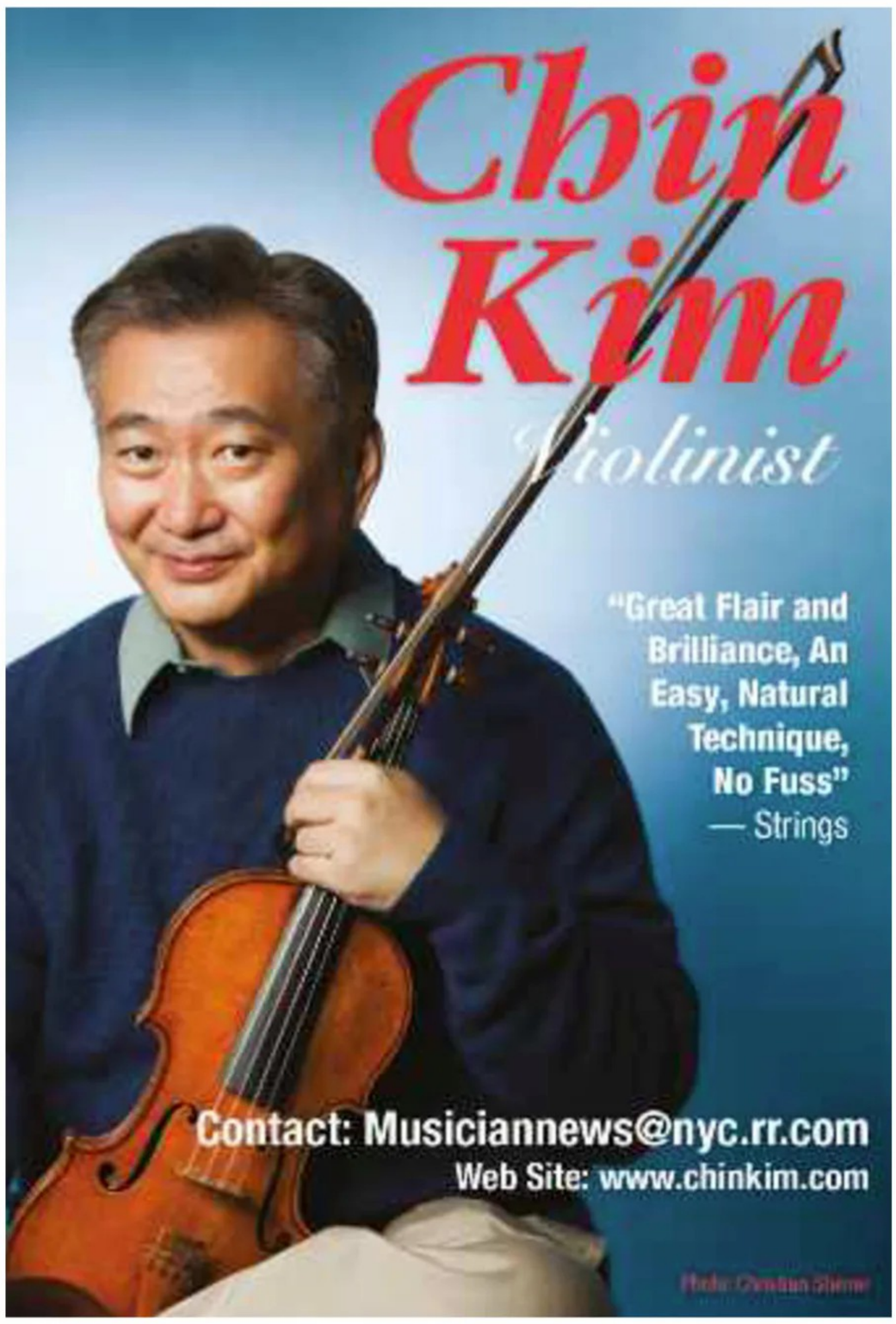
*Ösz* ('Autumn') by Gábor Lisznyay-Szabó (**example 2**) is a simple but emotionally complex short piece that tempts the student to make a heartbreaking sound within a romantic idiom. The gradual crescendo and decrescendo encourage a wide exploration of tonal possibilities, with two top-D climaxes that have to be played near the bridge to sound convincing.

**EXAMPLE 2** Extract from *Ösz* ('Autumn') by Gábor Lisznyay-Szabó

The slow movement of Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata (**example 3**) contains more sudden and extreme changes of contact point. Take the following few bars, where it is essential to use the right-hand first finger for the lane change to give a different colour for the pianissimo. Because the music demands that the bow moves over the four strings, this example demands careful forethought as to contact-point management. ▹

**EXAMPLE 3** Extract from the third movement of Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata



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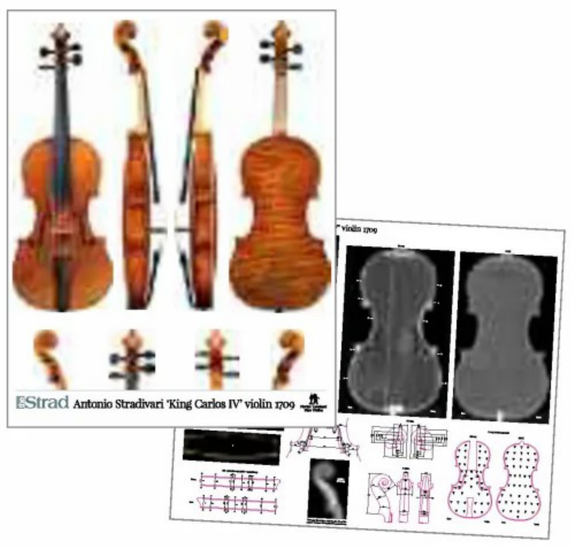
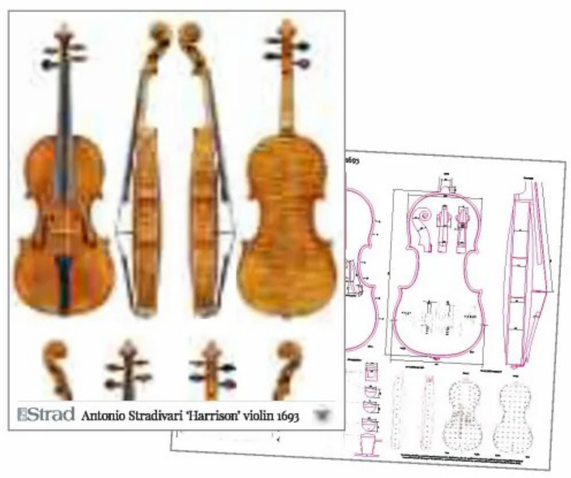
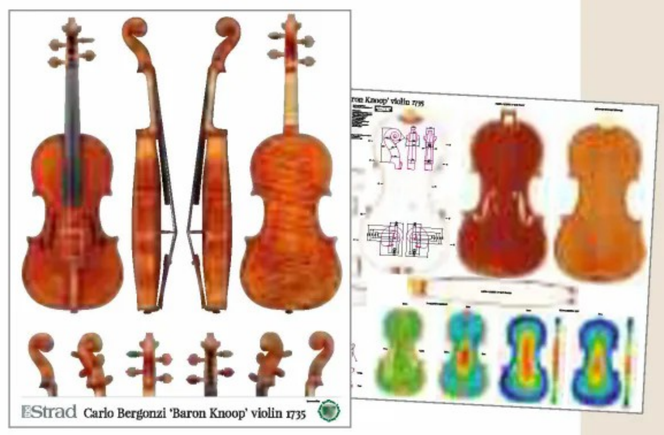



**A. Stradivari 'King Carlos IV' violin 1734**
Made during Stradivari's 'golden period', this is one of the rare examples that is so well preserved that its sound is seldom matched by other violins of the era. The maple back has deep, wide flames descending slightly, which shimmer like water in the light.




**Antonio Stradivari 'Harrison' violin 1694**
. A perfect example of Stradivari's Long Pattern, the 'Harrison' was for many years the principal performing instrument of Kyung Wha Chung. It is now part of the collection of the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota, US, and is one of only six Stradivari violins to survive with its original nailed-in neck.




**Carlo Bergonzi 'Baron Knoop' violin 1735**
Featured in the July 2021 issue, this violin demonstrates all the hallmarks of Carlo Bergonzi's mature style, as well as the influences of both Antonio Stradivari and Guarneri 'del Gesù'. Made from top-quality spruce and maple, it shows the exquisite care with which Bergonzi prepared all his finest instruments.

Your range of expression may not always need to be 'nice', especially in modern music. In *Wavesongs* by Gordon Crosse (**example 4**), these bars call for a groaning sound, almost sul ponticello; they are played with a slow bow near the bridge at the very limit of what can be achieved before the sound cracks, and are intended to sound painful – here, context is everything and it is necessary to play with evident intention for the audience to understand that this is no error on the player's part.

**EXAMPLE 4** Extract from *Wavesongs* by Gordon Crosse

## IN YOUR PRACTICE

- The first ten minutes of your practice are gold because you are fresh; use them to make contact with your inner cellist. Play as you feel and enjoy being the star of the show; after all, there's no other cellist in the room. Make a sound that you love.
- Have an aim; it's important to know what you seek to achieve in your practice
- Make sure that you spend a proportion of your practice focusing in detail on sound production so that you understand the range of your sound palette (which will be somewhat different in every piece of music). Check in with it daily.
- Call on your 'cello voice' to help define the character of what you want to convey in the music you play. It is good to do this in the practice room so that you don't feel inhibited.
- Playing the cello is a tactile activity. Come back to it regularly and only repeat passages when there is a reason to do so. If you have fixed all the coordinates, trust them to work for you next time you need them.
- If you are bored for whatever reason stop, practise something else, or take a break. Your creativity always needs to be alive and focused.

## TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Ensure that your student's cello and bow are well set up and that the strings are neither too tight nor too loose. In both cases it will prove difficult to get a comfortable, usable core to the sound.
- Start with the personality of the student
- Ask your student to point out the climax of the current piece, then to play it through to you in such a way as to show you that this high point is really special. You may then ask them to take the lead-up to the climax out and to practise it separately focusing on the approach and departure.
- Engage the creativity of your students by asking them to try things out at home and have an opinion to report back. Make it clear that it is not compulsory for them to like what you suggest, but by experiencing it they will have widened their thinking and broadened their possible array of options.
- As you problem-solve and take technical aspects apart with the student, never lose sight of the music to which it is relevant
- Choose your student's repertoire carefully to make sure that they develop both the right- and left-hand sides of the brain

INTERVIEW BY NAOMI YANDELL

## FURTHER MATERIALS

***Jacqueline du Pré and the Elgar Cello Concerto*** by Christopher Nupen.
This is the film that inspired me to take up the cello at the age of twelve.

**The André Navarra teaching videos**
These are very detailed and technical but well worth watching closely.
youtu.be/H08Icu0nbQI

**NEXT MONTH**
Double bassist Yung-Chiao Wei on finding effortless ways to play

# Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

## CONCERTS

### THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS
Our pick of the new releases

The **Spektral Quartet**: Adams family values
PAGE 86

A luminous chamber recital from **Johan Dalene**
PAGE 88

**Purcell** fantasias of sublime melancholy
PAGE 91

## New York

Strength and tonal beauty from Simone Lamsma

### SIMONE LAMSMA (VIOLIN) MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA/ JONATHON HEYWARD
DAVID GEFFEN HALL 4 AUGUST 2023

In a delicious twist of fate, Simone Lamsma gave me my second helping of Barber's Violin Concerto in less than a month, after Gil Shaham had a rollicking time in July with the National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America at Carnegie Hall. With the smaller Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, Lamsma gave Barber's luscious vehicle added strength with her 1718 'Mlynarski' Stradivari, its tonal beauty completely filling the recently renovated David Geffen Hall. At times she leaned in towards concertmaster Ruggero Allifranchini, a veteran of this festival, in solidarity with the orchestra's violins.

Conductor Jonathon Heyward – music director designate of both the Mostly Mozart Festival (which will be changing its name next year) and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra – is himself a cellist, and seemed empathetic, not only to the strings but the entire ensemble. In a world premiere by Jessie Montgomery, *Records of a Vanishing City*, Heyward coaxed maximum commitment from the group as it evoked the composer's vision of the Lower East Side in New York City.

To close came an agreeable account of Schumann's Third Symphony, the 'Rhenish', with strings sounding even more mellifluous, thanks to the improved acoustics in the hall. One of maestro Louis Langrée's early innovations was moving the stage forwards in the space – a change that has now been made permanent, with better sightlines, seating behind the stage and increased presence among the instrumentalists.

BRUCE HODGES

### BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL SOLOISTS, BARD FESTIVAL CHORALE/JAMES BAGWELL, ORCHESTRA NOW/LEON BOTSTEIN
FISCHER CENTER, BARD COLLEGE 4 AUGUST 2023

This year's Bard Music Festival was a celebration of Ralph Vaughan Williams, presenting a number of his lesser-known works and setting his achievements in context. After a lengthy but interesting

LAWRENCE SUMULONG

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

introduction by Leon Botstein, the first concert began with a singalong of Vaughan Williams's 'Down Ampney', led by the Bard Festival Chorale. His Quintet in C minor followed, persuasively performed by Jesse Mills (violin), Daniel Panner (viola), Ole Akahoshi (cello), Rieko Aizawa (piano) and Jordan Frazier (bass). The ensemble's passionate playing brought out the darkness and Brahmsian harmonies of the first movement and the heightened beauty of the Andante, with well-matched bow use and vibrato and lovely leading from Mills; the variations of the finale unfolded with sensitivity and attention to detail, culminating in a fantastic display of triumph before a quiet ending.

After the interval, Botstein introduced the orchestral set, performed by The Orchestra Now, which began with a reading of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, played with powerful unity of sound and soaring lines. Vaughan Williams's *Concerto Accademico* followed, with Grace Park an affecting violin soloist. The final piece was a VW favourite: his *Serenade to Music*, stylishly given by the Chorale and soloists together with the orchestra.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

## Vermont

### LAKE CHAMPLAIN CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

ALL SOULS INTERFAITH GATHERING
SHELBURNE, 24 AUGUST 2023

Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival's 15th year featured 'Musical Capitals', a series exploring the contributions of composers linked to great musical cities. The matinee concert on 24 August was titled 'New Sounds from Paris' and featured violinist Soovin Kim and cellist Paul Watkins in Ravel's light and articulate Sonata. Their playing was transparent yet powerful, with the sweet timbre of Watkins's higher register a particular standout. Prokofiev's Quintet in G minor brought together Isabelle Durrenberger (violin), Jessica Bodner (viola), Nina Bernat (double bass), Titus Underwood (oboe) and Bixby Kennedy (clarinet), who made a powerful case for this idiosyncratic piece, full of the composer's characteristically relentless insistence.

The second half featured the Parker Quartet, which brought to Stravinsky's fiery and dynamic Concertino its trademark combination of precision, balance and timbral breadth. The Stravinsky seamlessly dovetailed into Debussy's masterpiece for string quartet, a bold yet effective move that highlighted both the similarities and differences between each composer's tonal language. The Debussy was captivating, with pristine intonation and rhythmic clarity.

If this concert is any indication, Gloria Chien and Soovin Kim have accomplished a marvellous feat in northern Vermont during their tenure as the festival directors, with great things in store for its future.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

## Bowdoin

### CALDER QUARTET, EDWARD ARRON (CELLO)

STUDZINSKI RECITAL HALL, BOWDOIN, MAINE 31 JULY 2023

Thomas Adès's *Arcadiana*, written when he was just 23, remains one of his most endearing works, as the Calder Quartet demonstrated at the Bowdoin International Music Festival. Particularly effective was the third movement, inspired by a Schubert song with 'dripping pizzicatos', with an echoing glissando in the following movement. A welcome idyll appeared in the sixth movement 'O Albion' (based on Elgar's 'Nimrod'), and the foursome nailed the offhand ending, which trailed off into the distance.

Edward Arron joined Eric Byers as an additional cellist for Boccherini's Quintet op.28 no.4, to which the musicians brought a drawing-room intimacy. The nimble finale was especially fetching, bubbling over with spryness and humour. The group's giddy expertise drew wild cheers from the crowd, with many of the audience seated on stage.

After the interval, for Beethoven's op.131, those on-stage chairs had disappeared – perhaps a conscious decision to underline the work itself, without audience reactions. In any case, the first movement possessed reverence and fragility. Smiles throughout conveyed the rapport between the players, such as the fourth movement's effervescent pizzicatos. In the Presto the group found exactly the right mix of playfulness and speed, aided by lissom bow strokes and expert timing. Among the legions of musicians who can give this monument the enigmatic glory it deserves, the Calders can easily join them. An encore seemed almost mandatory, and the players obliged with more Beethoven: the fourth movement of op.18 no.3.

BRUCE HODGES

# London

## FANTASTICUS

WIGMORE HALL 9 JULY 2023

This concert featured only two-thirds of Fantasticus. With violinist Rie Kimura indisposed, viola da gamba player Robert Smith and harpsichordist Francesco Corti held the fort – and held it very well. Bach's three viola da gamba sonatas formed the spine of the concert. Smith performed the opening Vivace of the Third with agility and momentum. There was calm progress in the Adagio, spiked with expressive surges and nice ornaments, and the final Allegro was dance-like and energetic.

The four movements of Froberger's Suite no.20 in D minor were stately, with an improvisatory air. In the initial Adagio of Bach's Second Sonata there was plenty of give and take between the artists, with Smith careful to let Corti sound through. Along with the springing rhythmic precision of the Allegro there was great expression – and even touches of humour; after the beautifully contoured Andante the pair built up quite a head of steam in the closing Allegro.

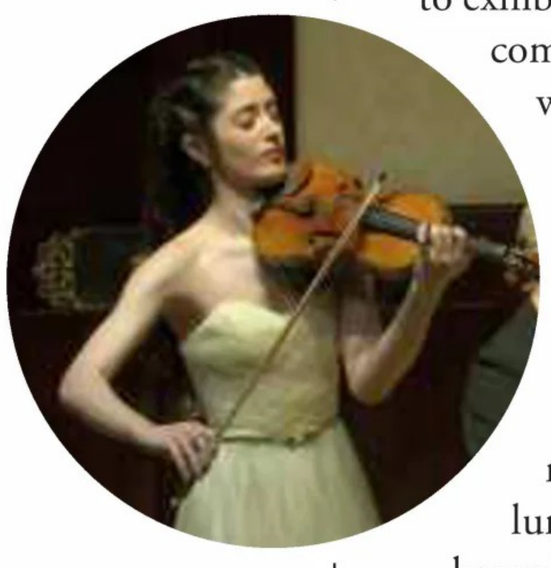
Smith's own solo work *Dido's Torment* is an entertaining piece, sometimes chordal, with plenty of double-stopping and syncopated up-tempo passages, all played in fine style. After a vivacious, virtuoso performance of Muffat's Passacaglia in G minor for harpsichord, Bach's First Sonata was variously mellifluous and exuberant.

TIM HOMFRAY

## MARÍA DUEÑAS (VIOLIN)
## JULIEN QUENTIN (PIANO)

WIGMORE HALL 10 JULY 2023

María Dueñas launched into Beethoven's First Violin Sonata with exuberance, before going on to exhibit the kind of unassuming technical command which meets all challenges with ease and grace. She pressed ahead through the first movement (shorn of its exposition repeat), definitely two to the bar, sometimes bold, at others feather-light and elegant, and showed a penchant for the occasional excursion up the G string. In the Andante con moto she was a sensitive partner to the luminous playing of Julien Quentin, and brought Haydnesque wit to the Rondo finale.



Exuberance and grace from María Dueñas

The opening melody of Schubert's A major Sonata D574 (or 'Grand Duo' as the publisher christened it) was delicate, and the transition to the second subject suitably urgent. Again, there was no repeat; its development found Dueñas almost fierce-sounding, contrasting effectively with a coquettishness to the slinky Trio of the Scherzo, and finely graded dynamics in the lyrical Andantino. The opening of the final Allegro vivace was vigorous and muscular (and yes, this time with the repeat).

In the first movement of Debussy's sonata she was constantly expressive, demonstrating subtle differences in the playing of staccato quavers and building surely to the Appassionato climax. The two musicians neatly caught the quixotic, quicksilver interplay of emotion and character in the *Intermède,* and the sonata's closing moments were ecstatically affirmative.

TIM HOMFRAY

## BBC PROMS 2023

**Peter Quantrill finds a wealth of riches in this year's Proms season at the Royal Albert Hall**

Seven violin concertos presented a surprisingly diverse bouquet of idioms at the 2023 BBC Proms, and a remarkably consistent level of finesse in performance. There were no real duds, although **Elena Urioste**'s advocacy of the concerto by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (19 July) failed to convince me of any claims for a neglected masterpiece. Urioste leapt into the grandiose opening theme and pulled strongly against the tide of her accompaniment as though rowing a skiff on a rolling sea. The problem lay less in any slack response from BBC National Orchestra of Wales under Tadaaki Otaka than in the ponderous character of the material itself. Urioste's slender tone and focused double-stopping carried well in the hall, but so much of her part in the outer movements is sequential noodling, repetition and imitation of Dvořák that the *verismo* charm of the central nocturne brought a welcome contrast.

On the following night (20 July) **María Dueñas** lit up the hall with an electrifying account of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, so improvisatory in feel and smoky in tone as to banish any reservations over the work's singular form. Just 20, but with several years' experience of performing the piece, Dueñas brought a deep and obviously native understanding to a solo part written for Sarasate. Josep Pons, too, knew what to do with Lalo's picture-postcard Spanishry in his direction of the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Rhythms were tightly clipped all the better to give the soloist free rein in leaning into the dance rhythms animating the solo line.

Amid a dismally wet English summer, more Mediterranean heat was brought to South Kensington by **James Ehnes** with Walton's Violin Concerto (3 August). The piece is so fiendishly complex on the page that each new live performance

COURTESY WIGMORE HALL TRUST

tends to sound quite different, and what Ehnes calls its 'rare and special, sad beauty' can be obscured. Not on this occasion: his self-effacing platform manner belied a reassuring weight of tone and entirely personal brand of portamento. The sheer Prokofiev-like devilment of the tarantella scherzo commanded awe, but Ehnes's shaping of the unpredictably angular progress of the outer movements, securely supported by the BBC Philharmonic under John Storgårds, was the greater achievement: the whole work unfolding logically as it rarely does.

What Grace Williams's Violin Concerto looks like on the page was impossible to ascertain, even for the soloist **Geneva Lewis**, apparently. Preparing it for this rare revival (8 August), she had to make do with learning the piece purely from the solo line: a tough assignment, but one that she brought off courageously, though without giving cause to believe that the concerto would enter her repertoire (or anyone else's) any time soon. Having composed it in 1950, Williams herself had discouraged performances thereafter. The idiom follows the by-then well-worn path to Hollywood, with two opening slow movements in which Lewis was called upon largely to soar lyrically above big film-score textures (BBC NOW under Jaime Martín), which she did without putting undue pressure on the core of her tone. Another soloist might have laid on the glamour more strongly; Lewis's restraint in this regard, and her absolute purity of intonation in some mercilessly stratospheric writing, paid off in the fast and furious, sub-Korngold finale.

The celebrity wattage at the Proms steadily goes up as the nights draw in. **Les Siècles** visited on 20 August under their founder director François-Xavier Roth. Perhaps it takes a period-sensitive ensemble to bring a Neoclassical lightness of being to the hyper-complex opening game of Ligeti's Violin Concerto, and then an unadorned, almost Bachian purity to the second-movement Aria. Soloist Isabelle Faust stripped back her tone to mere threads here before building it imposingly through the course of the Lento intenso passacaglia, and then evoking an entire band of gypsy fiddlers in one superhuman whole through the finale. Her cadenza, a teamwork effort with the composer Oscar Strasnoy, revisited the concerto's main themes with characteristic intelligence, drawing it into the mainstream from Mozart to Bartók and beyond.

Ligeti's radical reinvention and renewal of concerto tradition is written into the score, even if it takes a virtuoso to pull it off. Elgar's Violin Concerto requires something extra from the soloist if it is not to fall back into familiar tropes of Romantic languor and Edwardian retrospection. In this regard, **Christian Tetzlaff**'s approach, aided at every turn by Sakari Oramo's direction of the BBCSO (24 August), proved a revelation. All the turns of rubato and portamento which belong naturally to the heritage of Elgar's writing were kept on the move towards a goal of piercingly direct expression. Tetzlaff even brought a tumbling playfulness to passages of both outer movements which made Elgar's sudden and periodic access of deep feeling all the more profoundly true to form. He carried over this febrile mood of sustained inspiration into the Andante, uniting its tonal world with other 20th-century concertos such as Berg's and Bartók's, and making perfect sense of Elgar as, if not a modernist, then a master entirely of his time.

Perhaps the most cultivated violin sound of the season was saved for last, with **Augustin Hadelich**'s playing of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto (30 August). Paavo Järvi, conducting the Zurich Tonhalle, had any number of neat tricks up his sleeve – a Russian folk-like flick of the rhythm here, an unwritten Mannheim-style diminuendo–crescendo there – but it was Hadelich's more straightforward musicianship and burnished central European tone that delighted, building tension through the first movement not with raw pace, but a long-term harmonic argument towards a cadenza that, for once, stunned the noisy Proms audience into silent rapture. Even Hadelich could not prevent the finale from going around in circles, but he pulled out the best encore of the season with his own arrangement of an Appalachian tune, played like a bluegrass reincarnation of Hubay. Astonishing.

PETER QUANTRILL

ANDY PARADISE

Augustin Hadelich stunned the Proms audience into silent rapture

# Reviews

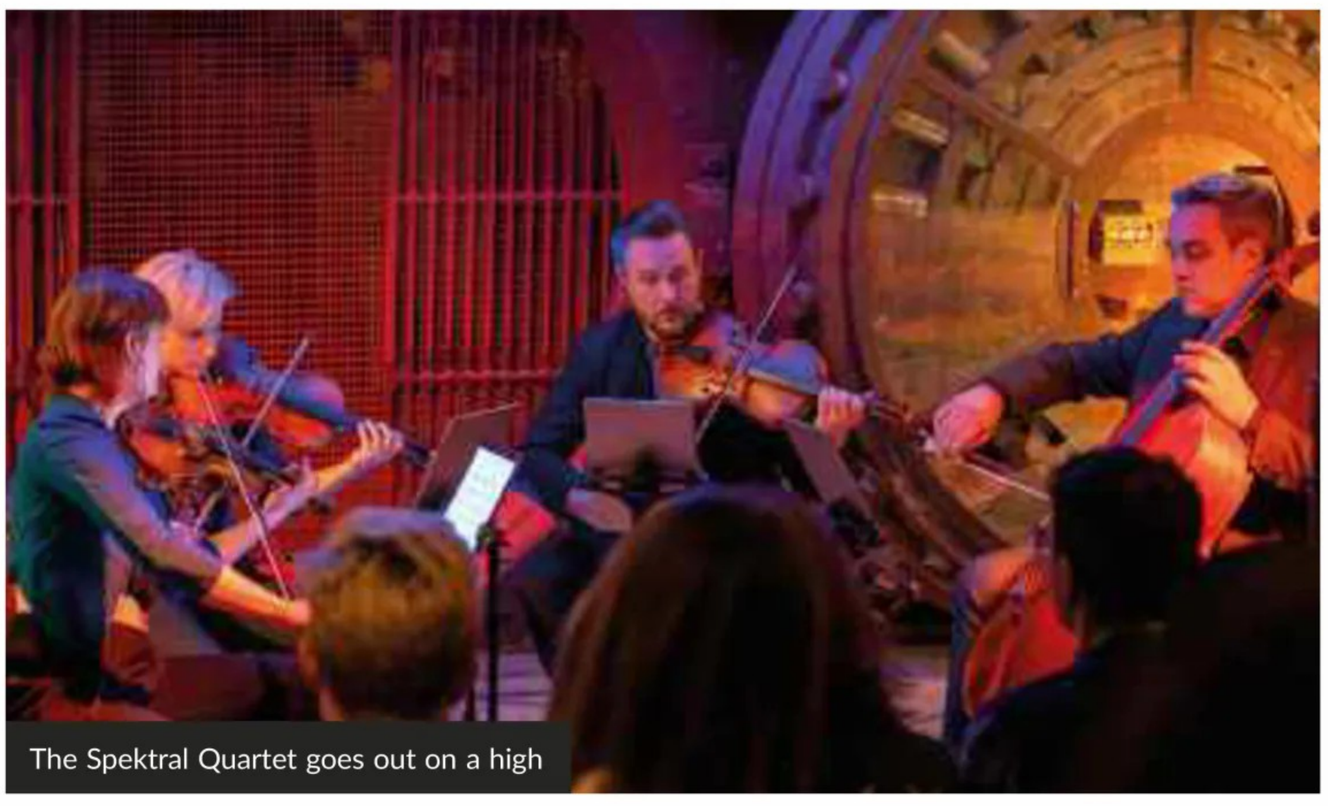
## RECORDINGS

**S. ADAMS** Violin Diptych; String Quartet no.2 'Current'; Shade Studies
**Karen Gomyo (violin) Conor Hanick (piano) Spektral Quartet**
OTHER MINDS RECORDS OM 1040-2

**A fine composer emerges from the shadow of his father**

San Francisco-born composer Samuel Adams is the son of the better-known John – something you won't find mentioned anywhere in the notes to this compelling new disc of three deeply rewarding recent works. It's entirely understandable, of course, that Samuel might want his music appreciated purely in its own terms – and there's plenty here that deserves due consideration and recognition. But there are also elements that acknowledge some of his father's earlier works and musical thinking, even if they reframe them in a decidedly 21st-century context. The long second movement of his 2019 Second Quartet 'Current', for example, sounds like a modern-day *Shaker Loops* with its endless scurrying figures passed back and forth between players, though Adams Jr plays up the music's machine-like artificiality with hisses and buzzes from miked-up snare drums, an effect put to equally intriguing effect in the quartet's more varied other movements.

Likewise, the second movement of his 2020 *Violin Diptych* picks out unusual melodic fragments on the piano from the violin's dashing, Bachian figurations, though it also introduces technology in resonators attached to the inside of the piano to produce attack-less washes of sound. The pieces' debts to minimalism are clear, and warmly acknowledged, but Adams achieves a very moving mix of cool-headed energy and propulsion with rich, passionate harmonies and gestures. His players match that beguiling mix, too: violinist Karen Gomyo takes her time in conveying the eloquent soliloquy of the *Violin Diptych*, while the Spektral Quartet – in one of its final projects before splitting up – plays with unerring precision and consistency in the quartet, but big-hearted intensity too (a balance that pianist Conor Hanick matches in the Terry Riley tribute *Shade Studies*).



DANIEL KULLMAN

The Spektral Quartet goes out on a high

It's a deeply rewarding disc that is by turns exhilarating and emotionally affecting, from a composer with very much his own distinctive voice – and captured in close, detailed sound.
DAVID KETTLE

**C.P.E. BACH** Sonatas for keyboard and violin: G minor H542.5, C minor Wq78, B minor Wq76, D major Wq71; Arioso con variazioni in A major Wq79
**Rachel Podger (violin) Kristian Bezuidenhout (harpsichord/fortepiano)**
CHANNEL CLASSICS CCSSA 41523

**A treasurable partnership from two giants of the early music world**

Who better to introduce us to the unpredictable world of C.P.E. Bach's violin sonatas than queen of the Baroque violin Rachel Podger and versatile early keyboard specialist Kristian Bezuidenhout?

Carl Philipp Emanuel, J.S. Bach's third son, lived another 38 years after his father, dying a year before Mozart. Here we have two Baroque-style sonatas from his youth (the G minor and D major), and two showing the edgy composer he was to become in his later years, embracing a more emotional and rhetorical language and displaying a more equal dialogue between the instruments.

There is an infectious rapport between the players here and a lithe, flexible approach to the music that brings it to life. Podger adapts her manner of playing to the pieces' changing styles, drawing a fine, gossamer thread of sound from her 1739 Pesarinius violin in the early Sonata in G minor, and laying into the lower strings more expressively in the C minor Sonata of 1763. The Presto final movement of this latter sonata is incredibly intense, its fugal

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entries almost obsessive and its surprise wrong turn near the end more shocking than humorous.

The slightly resonant church acoustic makes you feel as if you are sitting right there with the performers.

JANET BANKS

**BACH** Sonatas and Partitas BWV1001-1006
**Bojan Čičić (violin)**
DELPHIAN DCD34300 (2 CDS)
**Thoughtful readings that shed fresh light on Bach the architect**

Bojan Čičić exhibits a profound understanding of the architecture of these works, particularly of BWV1004's Chaconne and the sonatas' fugues, and he performs them neatly, accurately and with a remarkably relaxed bowing style, keeping substantially faithful to Bach's articulations. His *extempore* ornamentation, added largely in repeated passages or sections, is tasteful and unfailingly convincing. The recording is spacious and clear, but its reverberant ambience may be responsible for an overall scarcity of light and shade.

The first disc focuses on the three partitas. Čičić makes good musical sense of BWV1006's Preludio and is alert to the idiomatic nuances of each dance. He exploits the hierarchy of the bar to excellent effect, especially in BWV1004's Allemanda. He brings a refined sensitivity to BWV1004's Sarabanda, but the equivalent movement of BWV1002 and its Double seem somewhat laboured; not so, though, the Tempo di Bourrée of BWV1002 and Giga of BWV1004 or the buoyant Gavotte, unusually swift Menuet pairing and lively Bourrée of BWV1006.

In the sonatas, Čičić is especially adept at delineating the voice-leading of the fugal second movements and realises their densely polyphonic passages with calm control. He is freely expansive in the opening movements of BWV1001 and 1003, but occasionally loses track of the pulse, and the insistent rhythms of BWV1005's Adagio tend towards doggedness, despite some imaginative embellishment. He gives the slow third movements a relaxed sense of line and bows the final Presto of BWV1001 unusually lightly, compared with his more energetic approach in the equivalent movements of BWV1003 and 1005.

ROBIN STOWELL

**BEETHOVEN** Piano Trios vol.2: G major op.1 no.2, B flat major op.97 'Archduke'
**Sitkovetsky Trio**
BIS BIS-2539 (SACD)
**Characterful interpretations of Beethoven early and mature**

Somehow I missed the first volume of the Sitkovetsky Trio's Beethoven survey, released in 2020 to mark the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth. As with that disc, which included the early C minor Trio op.1 no.3, the lone Allegretto WoO 39 and op.70 No.2, this second offering combines a cornerstone of the repertoire with a relatively less well-known piece. Beethoven's G major Trio had always been for me the overlooked middle sibling of the three that make up the composer's op.1. Getting to know it better has been an unalloyed pleasure, and greatly enhanced by the group's refined musicianship.

I was already familiar with the playing of Alexander Sitkovetsky and Isang Enders, so the greatest revelation here was Wu Qian's multi-faceted pianism. With appropriately discreet pedalling, her sustained playing rivals that of her partners in its songfulness, while her pearly runs are beautifully clear, the piano's embellished second subject in the first movement of the G major being just one example among many. In this interpretation, the young Beethoven's work is firmly placed within the Viennese Classical tradition, while subtly underlining the ways in which he is already pushing at its boundaries. The composer's irrepressible humour is also given its due, with Sitkovetsky's witty spiccato in the finale guaranteed to raise a smile.

In the 'Archduke' Trio, written some 15 years later, the Sitkovetsky's weightier playing reflects the piece's larger frame, while refraining from placing it on a pedestal. Violin and cello blend beautifully in their many passages of thirds and sixths, Enders a satisfyingly forceful presence throughout, duly caught by the excellent recording.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

**BERGER** Metropoles Suite **GULDA** Wings **HANK** Three Songs for an Abandoned Angel
**Orchestra Musica Vitae/ Benjamin Schmid (violin)**
GRAMOLA 99284
**A winning mix of concertos that sets the feet a-tapping**

While it's fairly self-evident to say that your enjoyment of Benjamin Schmid's collection of three jazz-inspired violin concertos by Austrian composers will ultimately depend on your liking

for jazz, there's plenty here to entertain non-aficionados. The three works occupy gratifyingly contrasting styles: while Herbert Berger's somewhat indistinctive *Metropoles Suite* can occasionally sound like a bland film score, Friedrich Gulda's acerbic *Wings* collides together *Tzigane*-style excess and 1970s funk to thoroughly satisfying effect, and Sabina Hank offers a far more contemporary-sounding mix of minimalism, jazz and even a touch of trad.

Schmid himself is a compelling presence throughout, entirely convincing in the idiom's swooping portamentos and other inflections, and a persuasive improviser too: he's sultry and sensuous among Gulda's dark-toned lines, and gloriously over-the-top in some of Hank's more flamboyant writing. Swedish string ensemble Musica Vitae, of which Schmid is artistic director, brings boundless character and commitment to the performances, but the recording raises some issues of balance: Schmid is sometimes simply submerged within the ensemble's fulsome sound, and the close recording strangely captures unscored extraneous noises such as bow scrapes and unidentifiable clicks. That said, you do feel as if you're right there with the players, swept up in the energy of the music.

DAVID KETTLE

**STAINED GLASS**

**BOULANGER** Nocturne **BACEWICZ** Humoresque; Lullaby; Slavonic Dance; Stained-Glass Window **PÄRT** Fratres **PROKOFIEV** Violin Sonata no.2 **RAVEL** Violin Sonata

**Johan Dalene (violin)**

**Christian Ihle Hadland (piano)**

BIS BIS-2730 (SACD)

**A rising star shows his mettle in chamber music**

A winningly eclectic recital from Johan Dalene

This is an attractive CD, made interesting by its repertoire and marvellous by its quality. In the first work, Pärt's *Fratres*, Johan Dalene sets out his stall, with sweet-toned and delicate playing when soft, contrasting with strong, even rasping, vehemence, all done with great pacing and shape. A sense of intimate searching imbues the opening of Ravel's sonata, before the animated semiquavers lead into warm, expressive legato playing, beautifully phrased. Dalene plays the second movement 'Blues' simply, doing exactly what Ravel says, and catching its quirkiness and touches of jazzy smooch without indulging his inner Grappelli (as many do), although there are some well-judged portamentos. He scampers nimbly through the semiquavers of the perpetuum mobile finale, alongside Christian Ihle Hadland's clean, characterful playing of Ravel's chimerical piano part.

The first movement of Prokofiev's Second Sonata grows steadily in emotional power, the rhythmic tattoos of the development given with acerbic bite. Dalene brings ferocious energy to the second-movement Scherzo, with fierce sky-rocket arpeggios, balanced with lightness in the central section. After the graceful Andante he dashes off the finale with vigour and virtuosic finesse, and the two of them produce a barnstorming end to a performance full of colour and character. The Boulanger and Bacewicz pieces are small delights.

TIM HOMFRAY

**LIEBESTOD**

**BRAHMS/DIETRICH/SCHUMANN** F–A–E Sonata **SCHUMANN** Violin Sonata no.1; Three Romances op.94 **WAGNER** Tristan und Isolde: Prelude and Liebestod (arr. Say)

**Friedemann Eichhorn (violin)**

**Fazil Say (piano)**

NAXOS 8.574434

**A rare opportunity to hear a composite sonata complete**

Having released a disc for Naxos in 2020 of works by Say, violinist Friedemann Eichhorn and pianist/composer Fazil Say now return with a programme centred around German Romanticism.

Eichhorn's burnished tone serves this repertoire well. His lyricism has

MATS BÄCKER

an attractive lift in Schumann's Violin Sonata no.1, whose first movement has a suitably restless passion, although Say's accompaniment could add more granular detail. The balance between the instruments is just about right, but we don't get the impression of a piano with reserve under the bonnet. There's charm, even a touch of nonchalance, in the Allegretto, and brittle precision in the scherzo-like finale, without ever sounding tense.

Eichhorn shows a similar flexibility in Schumann's *Three Romances*, enjoying the expressive freedom offered by these salon-like pieces. The Eichhorn/Say ensemble is especially close and subtle here.

This programme offers a good opportunity to hear the complete composite F–A–E Sonata written for Joachim. The momentum and robust, martial tone in Brahms's movement reminds us why it remains the best-known of the four but, beyond Schumann's two contributions, Eichhorn brings off the opener by Schumann's pupil Albert Dietrich with persuasive drama. The Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan and Isolde* is a guilty pleasure to close, by turns intimate and surging.

EDWARD BHESANIA

**BRUCH** Violin Concerto no.1 in G minor **MENDELSSOHN** Violin Concerto in E minor **TCHAIKOVSKY** Violin Concerto in D major
**Nathan Milstein (violin) Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/William Steinberg; Boston Symphony Orchestra/Charles Munch**
BIDDULPH 85035-2
**A classic Romantic pairing finally makes it on to CD**

Nathan Milstein's 1953 mono Mendelssohn and Bruch, largely responsible for establishing the two

Nathan Milstein: unsurpassed in Mendelssohn

works as a popular LP coupling, are making their first CD appearance.

Milstein was the greatest interpreter of the Mendelssohn and this is the central one of three 'official' recordings. The opening phrases have a pleading quality unique to him and the whole of the first movement tugs at the heart strings, with a fine cadenza; the Andante is a masterly demonstration of simplicity combined with depth, and Milstein's lovely tone in the transition leads to a finale which really sounds like Mendelssohn.

William Steinberg (a native of Cologne, like Bruch) gives the G minor Concerto a solidity that never becomes stolidity, although the reading as a whole does not match Milstein's 1942 one with Barbirolli. The Adagio has a searching quality, and the finale is as satisfying as a tankard of good Kölsch beer.

The Tchaikovsky (also from 1953) sounds a little fierce here – there's a better transfer on Naxos, where it is coupled with short pieces. Former violinist Munch gets quite animated in the first movement but a minute is added to Milstein's timing in 1940 with Stock; the cadenza is terrific. A beautiful Canzonetta is followed by a gutty start to a finale which is truly Vivacissimo.

So… Milstein or Heifetz? The palm goes to Milstein in Mendelssohn and to Heifetz in Bruch. Honours are even in Tchaikovsky, but I would trade both their urbane interpretations for Kogan's intensity.

TULLY POTTER

**ENNA** Violin Concerto; Symphony no.2
**Anna Agafia (violin) Bogotá Philharmonic Orchestra/ Joachim Gustafsson**
DACAPO 8224753
**A fine soloist can't rescue a conservative Dane**

The Danish composer August Enna was born in 1859, only five years before Richard Strauss, whose music sounds like the work of a dangerous radical by comparison. The curiosity is that Copenhagen was no backwater by the time Enna wrote his Violin Concerto in 1896. Many composers from the cold north have felt a yearning affinity with southern climes; Enna's distant Sicilian ancestry, his own experience as both a violinist and an opera composer, and his evident admiration for the example of Tchaikovsky, all leave an imprint on the concerto.

Unlike Tchaikovsky's Canzonetta, Enna makes his slow movement the work's centre of gravity, lifting a fragment of Canio's 'Vesti la giubba' from Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* for melancholy melodic inspiration. Neither outer movement is especially quick, but both of them bristle with Flesch-accented technical challenges which Anna Agafia takes in her stride. She made a first-class, mostly overlooked debut on the Claves label earlier this year with concertos by

Nielsen and Szymanowski. Her tone is beautifully centred even through hatfuls of double-stopping, and she has a singer's feel for the ebb and flow of a melody.

Agafia's elegant phrasing also deserves more shapely support than she receives here from the Bogotá orchestra under its Swedish music director. Their backward placing in the recorded mix serves her well, though they give a more stylish account of themselves in the fairy-tale, filmic sweep of Enna's Second Symphony. Why no Danish ensemble could be found to do the honours, we can only speculate.

PETER QUANTRILL

**FARRENC** Piano Trio no.2 in D minor op.34; Trio no.4 in E minor for flute, cello and piano op.45; Variations concertantes sur un mélodie Suisse op.20; Violin Sonata no.1 in C minor op.37

**Linos Ensemble**

CPO 555 538-2

**Finely balanced music-making makes a strong case for Farrenc**

Louise Farrenc's works reflect her composition studies with Anton Reicha rather than her Parisian roots and their late-Classical style, skilful craftsmanship and melodiousness have often drawn comparison with those of Mendelssohn. Throughout these performances, Konstanze Eickhorst revels in the brilliance of Farrenc's pianism, overcoming the technical challenges of the outer movements of op.34 with panache; but she never overshadows her colleagues, ensuring the string lines come through the textures. Such democratic awareness is also evident in the sonata-form opening movement of op.45, but flautist Kersten McCall is allowed to take centre stage in its songful ternary Andante and contrast her athleticism and lyricism in its energetic Scherzo and Trio and motoric finale. The string players in both works flit in and out of the limelight with due musical sensitivity.

Eickhorst and violinist Winfried Rademacher combine in urgent, full-blooded accounts of the outer movements of the sonata and admirably contrast the Poco adagio's noble opening melody with its agitated central section. The oddball here is the salon-like op.20, which, following a majestic introduction, provides ample opportunity for Rademacher and Eickhorst to strut their stuff. The recording is spacious, clear and well balanced, but a couple of misleading presentational errors mar the overall package.

ROBIN STOWELL

**MOZART** String Quartet K387; Clarinet Quintet K581 **REGER** Clarinet Quintet op.146 – Vivace; quartet movements by **Beethoven, Dittersdorf, Haydn, Hoffstetter, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Reger** and **Schubert**

**Philipp Dreisbach (clarinet) Walter Reichardt (cello) Wendling Quartet, Wittenberg Quartet**

BIDDULPH 85029-2 (2 CDS)

**Mozart is the star in historic recordings by two fine German quartets**

Here are all the recordings made by two of the ensembles who continued Joseph Joachim's string quartet tradition. The lion's share of the set is played by the group which ran from 1911 to 1947 with Carl Wendling as leader and Alfred Saal as cellist (the players of the inner parts changed several times).

The gems are two complete Mozart works recorded in 1929, both with first-movement exposition repeats. The G major Quartet K387 features contained Classical playing, with the Wendling catching the wistfulness of the Minuet and its Andante cantabile unfolds very naturally, though the finale is a little short on humour.

For Mozart's Clarinet Quintet the Wendling is joined by Philipp Dreisbach in a reading that is the purest bel canto, the transitional string style – gut strings, portamento, sparing vibrato – going well with the liquid clarinet. Hearing Dreisbach may be the closest we can come to the sound of the legendary Richard Mühlfeld – both men started as string players and employed vibrato (a fact unknown to those modern clarinettists who play Brahms 'straight').

Of the single movements, the most important is the Scherzo from Reger's Clarinet Quintet – Wendling, Saal and Dreisbach played in the premiere and here give a delightful reading. The Scherzo of Reger's great E flat major Quartet op.109 is also delectable, with genuine wit. The reading of the Adagio from Schubert's C major Quintet with the excellent Walter Reichardt is also telling, if not quite on the level of Hollywood/Reher or Taneyev/Rostropovich. The Scherzo of Mozart's G major Quartet ends with the Viennese Trio – for the da capo, you would play the first part of the side again: those were the days!

The four 1913 sides by the Wittenberg Quartet, splendidly played, include three overlaps with the Wendling, making for interesting comparisons. The fourth is Mendelssohn's Canzonetta, very stylishly done. Second violinist Behr was Artur Schnabel's brother-in-law.

With 15 acoustic sides among the 28 tracks, this is not a hi-fi product; but anyone with an interest in fine musicians of the past will have a field day. Alas, the essay I provided has been shortened and a number of errors have appeared.

TULLY POTTER

**MOZART** Violin Concertos nos.1–5; Adagio K261; Rondo K373
**Renaud Capuçon (violin)**
**Lausanne Chamber Orchestra**
DG 486 4067 (2 CDS)

**MOZART** Violin Concertos: no.1 K207, no.2 K211; No.5 'Turkish' K219
**Aisslinn Nosky (violin)**
**Handel and Haydn Society**
CORO COR16200

**Highly contrasted readings of Mozart's evergreen concertos**

Having recently brought out a four-disc set of Mozart violin sonatas (reviewed last month), Renaud Capuçon now turns to the concertos, bringing them all together in recordings made in Lausanne last autumn. At the same time, Aislinn Nosky completes her survey with the First, Second and Fifth concertos, recorded in concert in Boston between 2019 and 2023. While the approaches are naturally a world apart – suave modern instruments and techniques versus gut strings and period manners – the aims are identical: to reveal the beauty and ingenuity of these youthful masterpieces. Both succeed in their own individual ways.

Capuçon's concern is, as ever, with his trademark beauty and consistency of tone, while Nosky and her Boston players rejoice in the different ways in which historic instruments produce their sound. Compare held notes, such as in the first solo paragraph of the Adagio of the B flat major Concerto K207. Capuçon's long high B is still, serene and even, gently warmed by vibrato, while Nosky's bulges as the pressure of the 18th-century bow fluctuates from frog to tip. Whether in faster or slower music, Capuçon's sound always has a core of sweetness, whereas there's a tarter, more grainy element to Nosky's.

The true test is in the 'Turkish' episode in the finale of the Fifth Concerto. The travelling players are clearly in town in both performances, enlivening the party with some good, woody col legno (Mozart marks it *coll'arco al roverscio*). But you may feel that Capuçon observes the spectacle as if from a Vienna coffee house, whereas Nosky is right in there with them, delighting in the whirl of the dancers and the crackle of the campfire. The audience is audibly with her all the way.

The DG recording doesn't specify whether it's taken from concert performances but there is a palpable live atmosphere (but no audience noise) around the sound in Lausanne's Théâtre de Beaulieu. The Coro disc is explicitly live, in the warm wood-lined acoustic of Boston's Symphony Hall, though atmosphere comes and goes suspiciously in unaccompanied passages. Between these two immensely satisfying sets, there is something for every Mozartian.

DAVID THREASHER

**PURCELL** Fantazias
**John Holloway, Monika Baer (violins) Renate Steinmann (viola) Martin Zeller (cello)**
ECM 4856006

**An imaginative rethinking of music for viol consort**

The first Fretwork version of the *12 Fantazias*, once on Virgin, now Warner, has long been a dependable companion in tough times. Most of them, within the space of three minutes, transport the listener into a private world of pain and beauty, before issuing a gentle reminder in the coda that the rest of the world gets by with a fragile embroidery of good manners. Dowland may have stamped his name on an English brand of sublime melancholy, but there is no one to rival Purcell in these pieces for sunshine glimpsed through showers, save Monteverdi and Mozart.

To hear Purcell's suspensions planed of the viol consort's sustaining power and gentler glow of resonance

John Holloway, Monika Baer, Renate Steinmann and Martin Zeller: winning in Purcell

BRUNO BÜRGI

takes some adjustment. So does listening to them out of their published sequence, but in both cases the experience is instructive and illuminating. Holloway and his colleagues do not play at emulating a consort's homogeneity of tone – why should they? – while Holloway even colours some of the top-line melodies with dabs of vibrato, never too much. His booklet essay makes a strong case for the *Fantazias* as early quartet works, as well as illustrating his depth of understanding and love for these pieces no less than his playing. As a quartet, he and his colleagues open out the polyphony and bring a courtly elegance of gesture to those dance-like codas, while the minor-major harmony still blooms like an unseasonal rose in a Swiss radio-studio ambience.

PETER QUANTRILL

**SHEEN** Solo for Cello
**Anton Lukoszevieze (cello)**
THE TRILOGY TAPES TTTCD001
**An uncompromising but compelling journey rewards close listening**

Though it employs an unapologetically 21st-century vocabulary of rasps and whispers, there's a lot to compare the half-hour, 12-section *Solo for Cello* by young Manchester-born composer and conductor Jack Sheen with a piece such as Paganini's notorious Caprices. Both are breathtakingly virtuosic – in Sheen's case, written specifically for contemporary cello guru Anton Lukoszevieze, who dispatches the work's complex catalogue of rarefied sounds from a detuned, heavily muted instrument with unwavering commitment and insight. Both, too, devote their individual sections to in-depth explorations of particular techniques or musical motifs – which, in the case of Sheen's twelve contrasting sections, very persuasively butt together nervy mechanical clickings with dense, rumbling harmonies and even lyrical melodic fragments, each considered and reappraised in hypnotic not-quite-repetitions. Both works, too, serve as musical celebrations of their solo instruments: here, the remarkable richness of sound of which a cello is capable, barely nodding towards conventional playing.

Sheen's work is strangely magical in its evocations, and toys mercilessly with perceptions of time and of noise versus music, but its twelve-part structure leads you on a deeply involving journey through instability and threat to eventual stillness. It's a tough but rewarding listen from a composer who clearly has plenty to say that's fresh and provocative; Lukoszevieze's performance brilliantly reflects his very human struggles with this thorny material, in a close, authentic recording that captures every sonic nuance.

DAVID KETTLE

**VILLA-LOBOS** Cello Concertos nos.1 and 2; Fantasia for cello and orchestra
**Antonio Meneses (cello)**
**São Paulo Symphony Orchestra/ Isaac Karabtchevsky**
NAXOS 8.574531
**Persuasive advocacy of works that deserve to be better known**

Villa-Lobos is widely admired by cellists for his glorious *Bachianas Brasileiras* no.5. Two further cello concertos ought to have set pulses racing, not least given eloquent renditions by Antonio Meneses – his second recording of these works. Yet, for all his advocacy, the concertos remain stubbornly neglected.

Undoubtedly the highlight of this warmly recorded release is the Second

Antonio Meneses: championing Villa-Lobos

Concerto, composed for Brazilian cellist Aldo Parisot in 1953; it has material that is both striking and structurally integrated. The concerto opens with a memorable orchestral melody; the cello line, fervently defined by Meneses, soon takes centre stage. The middle of the movement has a catchy oscillating figure. The ensuing Molto andante cantabile also boasts captivating melodies and is followed by a Scherzo that packs a punch with Latin fire adorned by a virtuoso cadenza, concluding with a driving finale.

The First Concerto (1915) is somewhat different, having a distinctly French colouring. It too features some very pleasant melodic ideas and is given an energetic and committed interpretation by Meneses. But the work itself seems unremarkable and unmemorable in comparison with its successor.

French colours also feature in the Fantasia (1945), with a cello melody hovering over shimmering orchestral timbres followed by a virtuosic Vivace. The carefully honed ensemble makes the best possible case for the music, though once again the invention is not quite as captivating as in the Second Concerto.

JOANNE TALBOT

STUDIO FOTOGRAFICO GIELLE

# Reviews

## BOOKS

**Schubert's String Quartets: The Teleology of Lyric Form**
**Anne M. Hyland**

328PP ISBN 9781009210928
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS £85

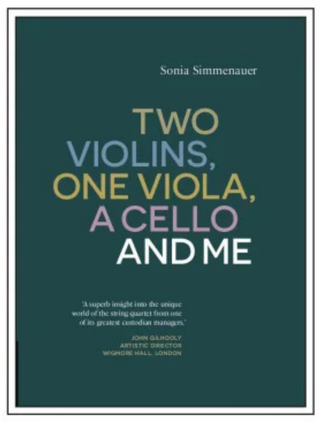
Anne Hyland's monograph is an offshoot of her doctoral research and some of her subsequent journal articles, appropriately reworked to reflect its principal theme of lyric form. Based on Schubert's corpus of string quartets and focusing especially on his eleven early works (1810–16), which have been marginalised by their posthumous dissemination and his later achievements in the genre, it challenges the view that Schubert was unable successfully to incorporate the lyric style into his sonata-form structures. It also proposes a new approach to lyric form that embraces historical musicology, idealist philosophy, literary criticism and music theory and analysis. Hyland's eventual historicist slant to her investigation demonstrates how the novel practices of early 19th-century Vienna-based composers – Joseph Mayseder is her principal exemplar – impacted on Schubert's formal and harmonic schemes.

Hyland's introduction paves the way for five chapters, which are arranged into two discrete, thematically oriented parts. Part One ('Contexts'), comprising two chapters with numerous subdivisions, sets the musical, contextual and social scenario. It contends that Schubert's lyricism extends to aspects of form and articulates the multifaceted dialectical condition of 'lyric teleology', and that this condition and many of his other characteristic formal innovations are particularly well represented in his early chamber music for strings. Each of the three chapters of Part Two ('Analysis') comprises analytical case studies, which focus on Schubert's 'employment of lyrical elements developmentally via identifiable and universally acknowledged techniques such as tertiary and symmetrical tonal structures, harmonically evasive or mobile theme groups, formal elisions, functional ambiguities and parametric dislocations'. Chapter 3 examines how Schubert manipulates the parameters of closure at significant cadential junctures in his sonata structures to create progressive forms. Founded on Adornian concepts, Chapter 4 explores the idea that lyric juxtaposition is fundamentally dialectical in creating a critical tension that presses towards a synthesis distinct from tonal resolution. The final chapter, concerned with 'undirectionality', brings the sonata–variation amalgam of the movements analysed into dialogue with form–functional theory and examines how Schubert 'mediates between lyricism and development in the service of a new kind of lyric teleology which enables both temporal novelty and a distinctly processual approach to form'. An epilogue offers a summary of the whole, contemplates the influence of Schubert's instrumental lyricism on later 19th-century composers and suggests areas for future investigation.

Largely error-free, the book is amply furnished with illustrative figures, tables and music examples. It also incorporates all the appropriate scholarly trimmings, including copious footnotes, an appendix offering a comprehensive listing of Schubert's string quartets (including details of sources, status, dating, publication and numbering), a well-stocked bibliography and an extensive index. Many performers will balk at engaging with Hyland's somewhat stilted prose style, which carries with it the earnestness of its thesis origins, her complex musical commentary that is not an easy read, and her tendency towards undesirable repetition. However, perseverance and much gritting of teeth will eventually reveal that, by examining the relationship between the concepts of lyricism, development, closure and teleology, and challenging formerly accepted opinion, Hyland has successfully brought the significance of Schubert's earliest quartets into analytical and musicological awareness, extended their reception in new theoretical directions and provided a solid foundation for future investigation in the field.

ROBIN STOWELL

Franz Schubert in an 1827 portrait by Gábor Melegh




**Two Violins, One Viola, a Cello and Me**
**Sonia Simmenauer (trans. Gwen Owen Robinson, Hartmut Kuhlmann)**

160PP ISBN 9781399945427
HARCAMLOW PRESS £12.99

Sometimes one picks up a book and no superlative is sufficient. This is a book for anyone interested in music, absorbed by personal interactions, captivated by chamber music or simply diverted by life's minutiae. Sonia Simmenauer was a concert agent for some of the most notable string quartets of the 20th century and beyond. There is an emphasis on groups that were especially known in the US, so some of our most beloved groups of the period, such as the Gabrieli, are not mentioned.

But many of the world's most notable string quartets were under Simmenauer's umbrella, and she writes eloquently and poetically about the curious life of the itinerant musician, bound to others through common purpose and artistic endeavour, yet needing to accommodate the twists and turns of the individuals making up the group.

It is a fascinating topic. Simmenauer writes from the beginning about her role, her background and the curious relationship she had with her musicians, whom she knew professionally yet less so personally. She writes of the pedestrian but important details of who pays for what, who decides on the level of luxury for a hotel, what happens if concert clothes are left behind, the unpredictability of rail and air travel, and the vagaries of the individuals too – the moods, the habits of turning up late but just making it on time to walk on to the stage, and the behind-the-scenes difficulties of bad news from home.

The book moves from these practical considerations to the musical ones: the role of practice, how a rehearsal is constructed, and indeed what a rehearsal is for. Walter Levin, the late leader of the LaSalle Quartet, is quoted: 'Rehearsals are for practising things that have been practised individually. You can't rehearse what hasn't been practised. Rehearsals are not for practising!' This is part of one of many interviews carried out by Simmenauer, and giving a raw authentic voice to the book; there are extended interviews with Günter Pichler (Alban Berg Quartet) and Gregor Sigl (Artemis Quartet), and quotes from Arnold Steinhardt, first violinist of the Guarneri Quartet. These extended interviews run throughout the book and give weight and depth to different areas under discussion.

Throughout the book, there is an elegance of writing, a respect for the life's work of musicians who might have renounced a more lucrative solo career for the 'feeling of arriving home, or absolute rightness' (Steinhardt on the beginning of the Guarneris), and a depth of understanding of the democracy needed within this musical microcosm.

Simmenauer includes many giants of the quartet performing world, from the Belcea to the Arditti, the Juilliard and the Jerusalem. There is a long list of her representations. Another list gives the repertoire of the Alban Berg Quartet. One of the attractions of the book is the space given to the music, to the importance of a name, to the place of the individuals of the quartet through their background. There is a pleasing unhurriedness to the writing, with

Sonia Simmenauer

chapters exploring topics in depth, with sympathetic understanding of what it means to play in this intensely private yet public world.

Quartets carry a name, and Simmenauer writes on the choosing and finding of names, too. The individuals within them may, of course, be known, but the quartet name is the label, their recognition. Simmenauer alludes to the shock that accompanied the unexpected death of Peter Schidlof, violist in the Amadeus Quartet. I remember the late leader Norbert Brainin in despair as there would be no more Beethoven. Indeed. The Amadeus Quartet died with Schidlof, and there was a rawness at the end of this era that never healed.

A quartet's name represents the life of a performing entity, subsuming the individual in four musicians' quest for musical identity and communication. Simmenauer writes from the inside with depth, musical insight and understanding of idiosyncrasy, human foible, and immersion in artistic endeavour.

ANNE INGLIS

ALI GANSCHI

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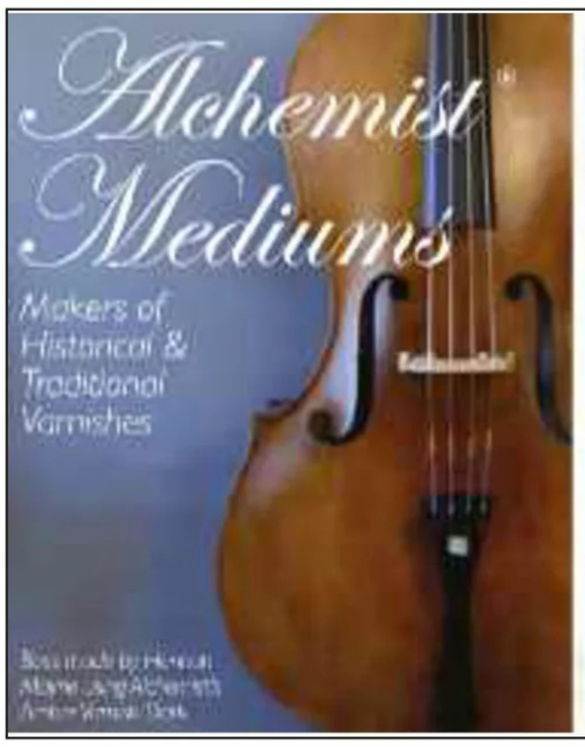


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100 YEARS AGO

# *From the* ARCHIVE

FROM THE STRAD NOVEMBER 1923 VOL.34 NO.403

## Composer A.M. Gifford presents a compelling argument for musicians to be more adventurous in their programming

One continually hears of the bad taste of the public. I have heard nothing else since I was a boy and apparently it is worse now than it has ever been, but the slightest thought will shew that what is miscalled the public taste is not the taste of the public at all, for the public are never consulted.

They have vast quantities of music flung at them which they must swallow or go without. For more than half a century the only music which could be heard was the music of the church, and it is remarkable the part that hymn tunes play in our national life, although half our hymns would never be sung were it not for the pretty tunes to which they are set. Our organists were afraid to play anything except the Fugues of Bach and the Sonatas of Mendelssohn, not because they understood them, but because it was considered the proper thing to do; they were neither understood nor played intelligibly, yet because they were unintelligible to the great mass of people who only tolerated them because there was little else, they were accused of having no taste.

There are thousands of people who have never heard a trio, nor quartet nor quintet. How then can one say that the public do not appreciate such music? Surely such trios and quartets as those by Haydn, Mozart and scores of others are intelligible to anyone with the least musical ear?

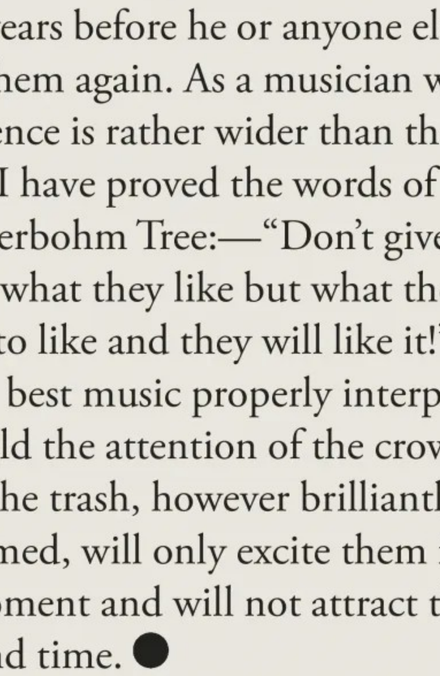
It is the same with violin solos. Nearly all soloists, so far as I see, are obsessed by the idea that the public can only appreciate fireworks. Out of thirty violin recitals I have not heard more than forty pieces—every violinist plays the same.

I know people who hate the violin because they think there is no music written for it save Bach's Chaconne and Brahms's Hungarian Dances or pieces of that type. Surely out of our hundreds of violinists we can find artists who have the pluck to give us the Sonatas of Handel, Corelli, Mozart, Beethoven and Grieg until they become as familiar as the Bach "Aria" and Handel's "Largo"!

Albert Sammons has recently given us the whole ten of Beethoven in three recitals and I suppose we must wait some years before he or anyone else plays them again. As a musician whose experience is rather wider than that of many, I have proved the words of the late Beerbohm Tree:—"Don't give the public what they like but what they ought to like and they will like it!"

The best music properly interpreted will hold the attention of the crowd when the trash, however brilliantly performed, will only excite them for the moment and will not attract them a second time. ●

DINA DOUGLASS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## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

***Anne Akiko Meyers***
The US violinist on how her passion for commissioning new works continues to define her career and approach to music

***Telemann's Fantasies***
Originally written for the viola da gamba, these works have recently been transcribed for performance by violists

***Filippo de Filippi***
Stefano Pio explores the intriguing life of one of Italy's top 19th-century music critics, who also loved violin making

***Inheriting a pupil***
What are the best strategies for teachers to adopt when taking over a student's tuition – or giving a 'consultation' lesson?

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Sentimental *Work*

# ALEKSEY IGUDESMAN

**The Andante cantabile third movement of Schumann's Piano Quartet in E flat major op.47 holds stirring memories for the innovative violinist and composer**

For me, the slow movement of Schumann's Piano Quartet op.47 is one of the most stunningly gorgeous pieces in classical music. It has a deeply melancholic quality that is mind-bogglingly beautiful and its harmonic structure gives it a deep emotional resonance. The interplay of the major and minor keys, to me, gives it a feeling of hope–despair–hope–despair, which makes it one of the most inherently sentimental pieces, in my opinion.

I can remember sightreading the third movement when I was young and realising then how fascinating it was. But hearing it now always reminds me of being in Vienna with my friend Julian Rachlin, soon after we'd graduated from music college. There used to be a drinking den there called the Broadway Bar, and if one of our musician friends was in town, we'd always drag them there to play together, even if there was hardly anyone else there. It was a normal music bar until 11pm when it always got lively! Everyone we knew would come along at one time or another, from Joshua Bell to Billy Joel. I can remember one time, after a few drinks, when four of us sat down together and started playing the Andante cantabile, and it turned into one of those magical moments that can never be recreated; there was a sense that we were playing in the heartland of 19th-century classical music culture, reliving the atmosphere that Schumann would have enjoyed when he was alive, hanging out with Brahms and Clara, and enjoying the music just the way we were doing. Now the Broadway Bar has been closed for around 20 years and I wonder if it would ever be possible to recreate a moment like that once again.

In 2010 I wrote a new show called *The Music Critic*, which brings together a selection of the most scathing reviews of some of the world's greatest classical pieces. On our US tour the reviews are read by John Malkovich, who plays an evil critic convinced that the music of Beethoven, Chopin, Prokofiev and the like is all weary and dreary. When it comes to Schumann, John quotes a contemporary article about Schumann himself, which says the composer wasn't a bad critic himself but at some moment decided to write music of his own. He mentions Schumann's self-doubt, how he felt he was trying to be a good composer but failing, and was sure that Wagner was far above him. And the article ends with the line: 'The mental institution in Dusseldorf can tell the rest.'

When I read that line I thought: what a horrible way to disregard such a musical genius as Schumann. And in the show, this is followed immediately by the Andante cantabile, and we can usually hear a little gasp of astonishment from the audience simply because of the impact of that sentence and the beauty of the music. It brings out the pain in the composer's heart more strongly, having just heard what the public might have thought about him and what he'd had to suffer through in his lifetime. John told me that he's close to tears every time we reach this moment in the show. I think that in that way, it's a very strong, sentimental piece, which I'm lucky to be able to relive on stage.

If I had to give a student a piece of advice, it would be to let the music speak for itself. It's so hauntingly beautiful that it's easy to overdo the sentimentality of it, by using exaggerated vibrato for instance. The melody and harmonies are all so strong that if you keep it simple, following the longer phrase, it'll always help you in the end. ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

Aleksey Igudesman, John Malkovich, Tanja Tetzlaff and Max Baillie in *The Music Critic*

PHOTOS JULIA WESELY

CHANDOS
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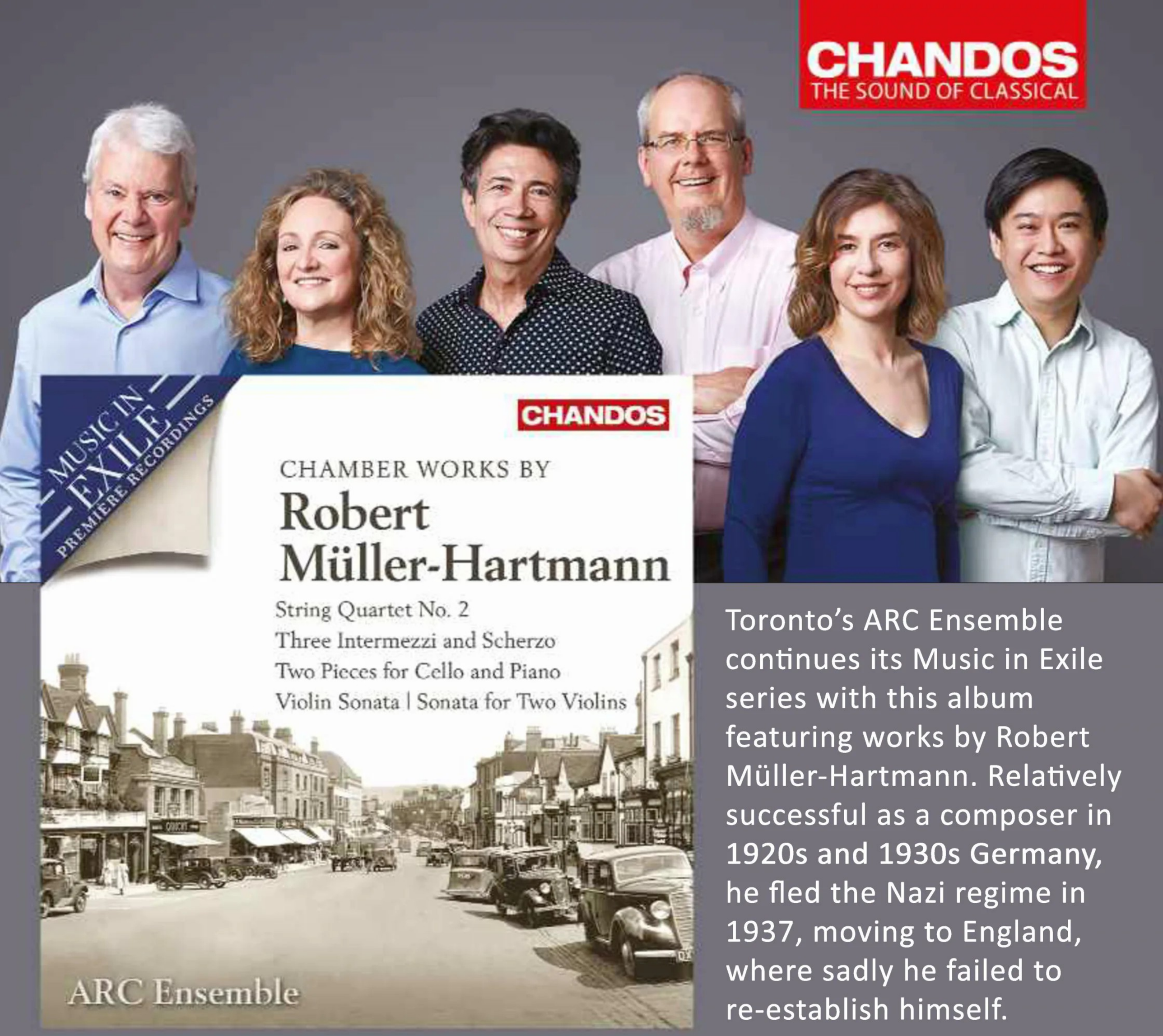


Toronto's ARC Ensemble continues its Music in Exile series with this album featuring works by Robert Müller-Hartmann. Relatively successful as a composer in 1920s and 1930s Germany, he fled the Nazi regime in 1937, moving to England, where sadly he failed to re-establish himself.

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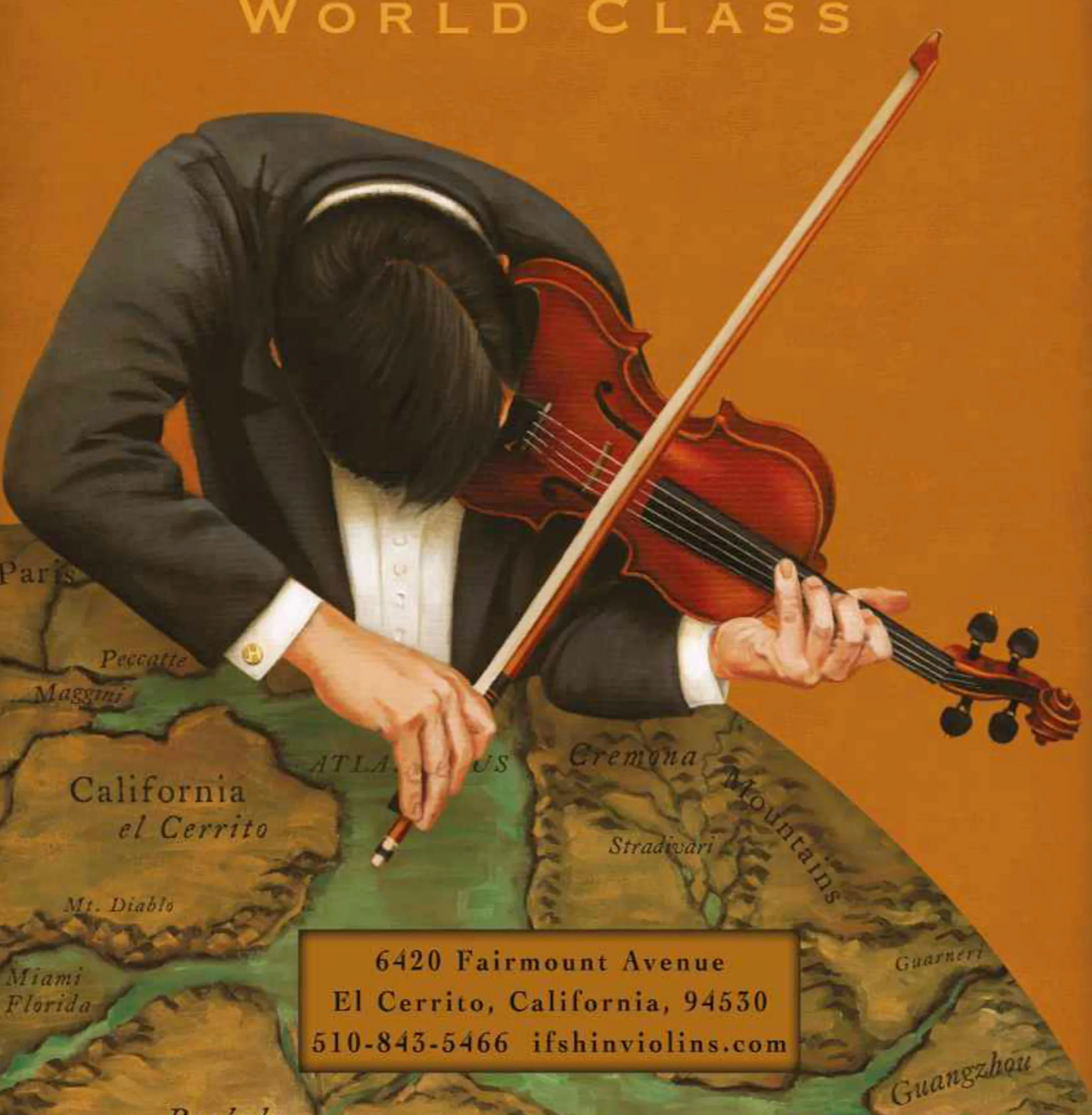


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